way down (would you say I'm worthy?)

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by mattHughdancy

Summary

Will is falling in love with his not-psychiatrist, but boy, does he have issues. Little does he know, his not-psychiatrist has more skeletons in his closet than the grave. Secrets, drama, and smut. A romance.

This is pretty self indulgent. I love season 1 AU's where Will Finds Out.

Notes

Thanks to my boyfriend who is also my beta reader as well as my sounding board. Couldn't have done it without you, Freshbrian!

There are some parts that, to me, still feel a bit wonky, but here it is - me trying my best. If even one person likes it, I'll consider it a job well done. Constructive criticism is always welcomed and encouraged.

I hope you enjoy!

Chapter 1

Chapter Summary

Title inspired by Just Pretend by Bad Omens.

Photos are scattered all over the desk in Will's lecture hall, long since empty of students. Across from him, tie loosened, crimson shirt sleeves rolled up to just below the bony process of his elbow, Hannibal flicks his eyes intently between the faces of the dead. Will flicks his eyes over the planes and dips of Hannibal's face.

"You already have your profile on this individual?" Hannibal asks. Will hums his affirmative. "Tell me."

"Late thirties, early forties. White male, because of course he is. Mother issues perpetuating from either abuse or neglect, a father who didn't help. That's why the women are butchered and then men are killed quickly but left relatively intact. His victims remind him of his parents in some way, either by looks or mannerisms. Maybe a combination of both, but I'd say either/or."

Hannibal arches a blonde eyebrow, looking back down to the desk. "I'd wager with the female victims, it's looks. They all have dark brown hair, green eyes, similar facial structure, particularly around their cheekbones and foreheads."

Will nods absently. "He's escalating. Just killing them isn't enough anymore," he says, voice a low rumble. He still hasn't looked away from Hannibal.

"How do you think he will accomplish that?" Hannibal asks, looking up at him. Will meets his gaze for a second, taking in the flecks of hazel and red that decorate his brown eyes, before dropping his own, pretending to look at pictures he has already memorized. "What would you do, Will, were you him?"

Will lets out a whoosh of breath at the loaded question. His toes are touching the water. He can physically feel the pull on his mind as he wades deeper, deeper. "I would keep them … so I could punish them for what they did to me," he says quietly, so quietly that Hannibal has to lean a little closer to hear him. "Wouldn't you?"

He can feel Hannibal observing him with great interest, but the other man doesn't respond to Will, knowing by now that when he gets like this, the words he utters are no more than rhetorical observations.

Will is cognizant enough to know that right now, he is both himself and not himself. He is as *other* as he isn't. He is someone else's shadow cloaked in his very own skin that fits too tight.

The words coming out of his mouth are both familiar and alien, and they come unbidden, unfamiliar. “Death is not punishment enough for you. I need you screaming. I need you terrified like how I used to be.”

Frantic longing. A need to *keep.* Deep unwillingness to let go. Will shudders. "Keeping them."

Hannibal tilts his head consideringly. “If he will no longer be disposing of the bodies,” he offers, “he will be much more difficult to find, will he not?”

When Will smiles, it has teeth. “Not for me,” he says with casual arrogance. “He’s made it infinitely easier for me to catch him.” Will draws a single finger over the face of the latest victim, almost reverently. Hannibal hasn’t blinked. “I will find you.”

Hannibal leans in. Will is too deep in his mind to realize the expression of absolute delight in his dark eyes. “How will you find him, Will?”

“His first victims will be his parents. He's chasing the thrill and closure he felt when he killed them, but no one else is giving him the same … zest. And as if that didn’t make it easier,” Will flicks his icy blue eyes up to Hannibal’s fleetingly, his smile sharp, “he’s getting sloppy.”

Will feels his skin twitch, trying to become something else. There is a brief moment when his conscience takes back the wheel, and in that short span of time, he looks at Hannibal and almost can’t believe what he’s seeing. If this were anyone else, he’d say he looks awestruck. But this is Hannibal. And this is *Will.* And if anything, Hannibal should be *afraid.* Everyone else is.

He’s fighting desperately to stay. He doesn’t want to wade back in, but there is nothing grounding him in this reality.

A hand touches his, lightly at first, hesitantly, and then with more power, their grip firm and unwavering, moving bones and ligaments underneath his muscle and skin. Will blinks rapidly, flashes of his surroundings like pictures fill his eyes. Hannibal’s mouth moving, the dim light of the overhead fluorescent bulbs, the dust motes that swirl aimlessly beneath them. Hannibal again, face close, mouth still moving. Will can’t make out what he’s saying. Sound is distorted.

He went in too deep.

The goal is fractions. Thirty percent killer, seventy percent Will. Just a glimpse. Just a fractal image to get the overall picture. Will feels fifty/fifty. It's too much. He tries to say something, but he's not sure who will be speaking.

The hand on his tightens, pulls him slightly across the desk. Hot breath against his ear. He can feel it - not as someone else, but as himself.

He’s surfacing.

“- here. You’re here, with me, Will. Come back to me.”

It’s something they’ve done many times before, now. The only thing that has ever worked. Will can feel the shadows slipping away, his skin fitting properly again. He watches in his mind's eye as the blurred images of some faceless killer start to slip away before leaving entirely. He breathes in deep and holds it before slowly letting it out.

Hannibal smiles at him - small, genuine, and private; face so close to his that Will’s eyes nearly go crossed. “There you are.”

Will's cheeks heat as he drops his gaze, squeezing Hannibal’s hand to let him know he’s okay before pulling himself away. “Here I am,” he agrees softly.

“It’s good to have you back, Will. You went deeper than you have in a long time.”

Will licks his lips. “There’s, um … similar circumstances, I think. It was compelling.”

“Because of your own history?” Hannibal asks.

“Something like that,” Will responds. He chances another glance up at the older man. “We’re getting better at that," he says as he starts to clear off his messy desk. "At me wading into their minds and you pulling me back to safety,” he observes, looking at Hannibal with warmth that he hopes isn’t too obvious.

“We’re getting better because your mind is getting stronger, now that you are taking proper care of it.”

“How am I doing that, again?”

Hannibal smiles again. “By allowing yourself to acknowledge the truth of your mind, you are able to more adeptly draw the line between these killers and *you*. By knowing yourself, you draw strength instead of fear of the unknown. In other words,” Hannibal smirks, leaning his backside against Will’s desk, “therapy has worked on you after all.”

Will rolls his eyes. “Only because my therapist isn’t really my therapist.” He feels raw with the whole ordeal, but he presses on. “He’s my friend.”

“I am glad to be your friend, Will. You are one of my dearest.”

Will bites back the possessive roar that wants to be his *dearest* friend, his only friend. The unhealthy desire brings a flush of shame to his cheeks and he starts gathering up the photographs and his written profile to distract himself from it, placing them neatly back into their respective folders, putting those folders back into the cardboard box from whence they came.

There are some things he has learned to accept about himself, but that doesn’t mean he will allow them to see the light of day.

“Have you eaten today?” Hannibal asks him.

Will chuffs. “Nothing you’d approve of.”

Hannibal tsks. “We have worked past dinnertime. Most restaurants will be closed. I’d like to invite you to my home.”

Will glances down at his cheap sports watch with its cracked plastic screen. Nine-thirty. “I’d hate to make you cook this late.”

“Nonsense. I enjoy cooking at every hour,” the older man assures him.

Will still hesitates, not wanting to overstep or intrude. “Well. I guess I’d be a fool to say no to your cooking, Doctor.”

Hannibal dips his head with obvious pleasure and starts to gather his things, uncuffing his shirt sleeves and shrugging on his coat when they are back in their proper place around his delicate wrists. “I will make us a single course so you can get back home to your dogs.”

Will grins shyly. “Sounds good.”

Hannibal smiles back.

Dinner is a simple, but hearty, seared beef tenderloins with rosemary and garlic potato spears and assorted steamed greens. Hannibal serves their plates with his typical flourish, outlining all the ingredients and the method of cooking as he pours them both a wine that’s as deep a red as his shirt.

He has removed his tie altogether, and has unbuttoned the first two buttons of his dress shirt, letting the beginnings of dark, graying chest hair peek through. Will licks his lips and averts his eyes after allowing himself a second more of inappropriate ogling.

Will holds the wine stem how Hannibal had taught him so as not to transfer body heat into the chilled beverage and takes a sip, holding it on the back of his tongue before swallowing. It’s heady and rich. Surprisingly, it's also familiar. “Nero D’Avola?”

Hannibal smiles at him proudly. “Very good, Will. What do you taste?”

He takes another sip, considering. “Hm. Bright pepper. Baking spices. Red fruit, but also … black fruit?”

“Your palate is improving. Do you like it?” Hannibal is looking at him like the rest of his evening hinges on Will’s answer.

“Yes. It’s very good. All of this looks good.”

“Well, let’s dig in, shall we?”

Will can’t help a private little smile at that. With as much time as they’ve been spending together lately, the mutual adoption of personal mannerisms was unavoidable. Will has noticed that he’s starting to like wine almost as much as his whiskey and that his speaking cadence is smoothing out, while Hannibal has been implementing more of the expressions

Will uses in his everyday vocabulary within his speech, *without* the use of invisible quotations, these days.

They were beginning to blur. It made Will as anxious as it did exhilarated. To hear some of the common and sometimes base idioms coming out of Hannibal's sophisticated mouth never failed to make his insides feel tight.

Seeing him dress down more casually when it was just the two of them was another blessing, but also a curse. The psychiatrist is too beautiful for his own good, and Will is weak for this man.

It is, perhaps, time to admit something else to himself, something he has known with surety for a long, long time. He knows it like he knows everything else about himself. He knows his hair is brown and curly, he knows his eyes are blue. He knows he has an unnamable darkness in him that is slowly but surely coming to the surface. And he knows, without a doubt in his mind, that he is falling in love with Hannibal Lecter; fast, hard, and painfully.

They eat in comfortable silence. Neither man is aware of the stolen glances they take.

"Let me help with the dishes," Will insists, helping to gather up their plates and glasses.

"Nonsense. You are my guest." Hannibal gives him A Look and Will can't help but fall a little more in love. "Guests do not do the dishes."

"Am I still just a guest, then?" Will asks innocently, looking up at him from the two inches of height that Hannibal has on him. He gives Hannibal his best puppy-dog eyes, knowing how well that trick usually works. Sure enough, Hannibal sighs, and folds with a barely there sigh of his own, a smile just touching the corners of his plush, red lips.

"No. I suppose you're not." He replies, soft as air. Will looks at him a little harder. Hannibal's eyes are crinkled slightly around the corners, mouth soft, which means that if he is surprised by this revelation, it's pleasantly. Will counts it as a win and heads to the sink with his hands full.

They do the dishes side by side, Hannibal washing and Will rinsing and setting them on the drying rack. They towel them off together once everything is washed, looking at each other every now and then.

When the sink is empty, and the dishes are dry, Will realizes with a sad pang in his chest that he will need to be leaving soon. It's becoming harder and harder to do.

"Thank you for dinner. It was amazing, as always," Will offers lamely.

Hannibal dips his head low, pleased regardless of his clumsy compliment. "You are most welcome. It is always a pleasure to dine with you, Will."

Will fights the urge to roll his eyes and rubs the back of his neck with his hand nervously. “You’re just saying that because I can appreciate your wines now.”

The look Hannibal gives him at that is slightly mischievous, slightly disapproving. “Not true.”

“Sure,” he sasses back.

Once Will and Hannibal have put everything away in their proper place, Will knowing where everything goes by now with how many times he’s watched Hannibal doing so, Hannibal walks Will to the front door. Their steps are unhurried. Will doesn’t want to leave, but he knows he has to. He doesn’t want to overstay his welcome in any case, and Hannibal would be too polite to refuse him more time at his own expense.

“Thank you for your help with the dishes, Will. I can’t remember the last time I did so side by side with anyone.”

The possessive beast inside Will howls with satisfaction. “It's nothing”

“Can I entreat you for a drink?” Hannibal asks.

Will is surprised, but shakes his head reluctantly. “I … the dogs. They’re probably starving by now.”

Hannibal licks his lips and nods once, slow and measured. He looks … disappointed?

His smile, when it comes, looks forced, overly polite in a way Will hasn’t seen directed at him in quite some time. “Alright,” he responds quietly.

They stand there staring at each other, Will’s coat in his hand, mind going a mile a minute, Hannibal still as a statue, unblinking. It would have unnerved Will were this anyone else, but Will knows … he doesn’t know actually. He doesn’t know what to make of this, but something is telling him this isn’t new.

Both men seem to want to say something, but neither do. Will wishes he could reach into Hannibal’s maw and pull whatever was lurking in his throat out into the light. He doesn’t.

Will is the first to look away as he puts his coat on. Hannibal, at the last minute, helps to soothe it down over his wrinkled shirt. Will wonders if Hannibal would like him more if he dressed better, at the very least if he combed his hair with something other than his fingers and ironed his shirts, but then does away with the thought. Hannibal is many things, but shallow isn’t one of them. Will wouldn’t change who he was, regardless. He’s been down that road before enough times to know it never ends well.

Hannibal is the first person in a long time to see him, really see him, and want to be in his life anyways. He doesn’t want to ruin that with frivolous changes that aren’t for his own benefit and pleasure.

“Please let me know when you arrive home safely,” Hannibal says after another lingering look.

“I will,” Will says.

“You may call me if you need anything between now and when we next see each other, of course.” If Will didn’t know any better, he’d almost think Hannibal didn’t want him to leave. He’s stalling. For what, Will doesn’t know.

Will bites the inside of his cheek and, after deliberating for a whole one second, reaches out bravely to stroke a finger down the back of Hannibal’s hand. Friends do that, right? “I will.”

Hannibal takes a breath at the touch. The older man nods resolutely once he has gathered himself and finally seems to relax his shoulders. Will doesn’t know why they were tense in the first place. “Drive safely, Will.”

Will smiles. “I will.” And with one last look over his shoulder, he leaves. Hannibal doesn’t close the door until Will is pulling out of the driveway and heading down the residential road.

On his way home, he thinks, but even with plenty of time between their respective residences, he can’t classify the look on the psychiatrist’s face, or why his simple touch had evoked a reaction in him at all. When he arrives home at last, Will still has no answer.

Will ends up finding the killer they had been profiling before. It had taken a mere three days of searching into the children of the victims, and Will had been right - the child of the first couple fit his profile to a tee.

He’s exactly how Will pictured him: average build and appearance, nothing that could ever stand out. Dark hair and eyes, early forties. His name is Michael Fletch.

Will had watched as Jack interviewed him through the two sided glass, knowing that he was looking at the man he intended to catch.

His interview was solid, but Will wasn’t convinced. Neither was Jack.

The next day, they find him in an old shack miles off the highway like Will had reasoned they would, decaying bodies stowed away like trophies in the damp basement. Mommy issues. Daddy issues. Typical and pedestrian. Boring.

Will feels distinctly unsatisfied when they cuff him and stow him in the waiting police car. He goes without a fight.

“Good job, Will,” Jack tells him. Will smiles and nods, shakes the hand that’s offered, but it all feels out-of-body and fake. His mind is elsewhere.

He had wanted to kill Fletch, but he hadn’t attacked, so there’d been no cause, not like with Hobbs, not like with Stamments. He’d surrendered and had been unarmed, so he had no

means, no excuse to give the man what Will thought he deserved - a clip full of bullets lodged in his flesh, hands around his throat, a beating with his hands.

He should be glad that he helped catch someone so monstrous. Instead, Will feels … empty, as he drives home.

He calls the first person that comes to mind, the person who is always on his mind.

“I think something is wrong with me,” Will tells Hannibal later that night. They’re in Will’s kitchen, at his shabby table sitting on unmatched chairs as they eat the trout Will had caught, pan fried with buttermilk and chopped pecans like he used to make for his dad.

Will thinks Hannibal looks good here, someone so refined in such an unrefined space. He likes that Hannibal lets Will cook for him, something he’s caught with his own hands. He wants to do more to care for the man that has everything, but is unsure how, or if it would even be welcomed.

“Tell me.”

“Michael Fletch. That’s his name. He surrendered when we found his kill cabin,” Will relays robotically.

Hannibal hums and takes another delicate bite, savoring the simple flavors of butter, pecans, and the white, flaky fish. He swallows before saying, “You didn’t want him to.”

Will looks at him imploringly. “I wanted an excuse to hurt him. At the very least.” He still can’t admit out loud that he had wanted to slay him, not even to Hannibal. “That’s … bad. I’m bad. Maybe getting to know myself instead of fearing myself wasn’t such a great idea.”

“I disagree. Thoughts are just thoughts, Will. You are stronger than you give yourself credit for.”

Will puts his fork down. His appetite is gone, if it was ever there. “But I don’t want these thoughts. They’re dangerous.”

“These thoughts are what compel you to find these men. They are as dangerous as a blade. When wielded properly, they protect, not harm.”

“But they can harm.”

“If necessary.”

Will takes another bite, swallowing it down with a few chugs of beer. Hannibal, likewise, sips delicately at his white Zinfandel.

“I don’t want to harm,” Will says helplessly. It’s mostly the truth, but there is a seedling of doubt burrowing into his mind. He thinks it’s always been there.

A hand touches his on the table where it rests, palm up. Hannibal’s hand. Will shivers at the soft touch. “Then you won’t. You’re allowed to have thoughts, Will. Those thoughts are

allowed to exist within the same space as your values. Your forts are fortified with the knowledge you have come to accept, and now they have windows so you can see through them clearly."

"Windows are easily broken."

"Not when laminated," Hannibal counters, taking his hand away and all the warmth in the room with it. "I trust you, Will," Hannibal says, and his eyes are deadly serious. "You must trust yourself."

Will nods even though he doesn't quite agree, doesn't think he should trust himself. He watches as Hannibal cuts into his fish, holding his fork like he's at a black-tie affair, like he always does.

"This tastes wonderful," he says to Will, and it's the first thing Will believes all night.

After they do the dishes together, Will walks Hannibal to the door.

"Thank you for coming out on such short notice. I know it's a long drive. Today was … I needed this."

Hannibal gives one firm shake of his head as if to physically shake off any attempt at gratitude. "I was happy to come," he says with the utmost seriousness. As if this was life or death. "You are my friend, Will. Besides, it has been some time since anyone has offered to cook for me. Since I was a child, in fact."

That makes Will smile. He likes that, likes doing something no one else has for him in that long. "No, I imagine people are too scared to cook for the great Hannibal Lecter."

Hannibal's crooked little teeth make an appearance as his lips part in a wide smile. "I suppose. I enjoyed it, though." He hesitates, and then laughs at himself, seemingly shy, but Will knows better. He's just seeing things he wants to see, and nothing more. "Perhaps we could do this again sometime?"

"You liked my cooking that much?" Will asks, raising his brow in surprise.

"I liked everything about tonight, yes."

There's that same awkwardness as before when Will had last been leaving Hannibal's house after a meal together - stilted and heavy as if Hannibal was preventing himself from saying something. Despite the passage of time and multiple hours, days, thinking about it and overthinking it, Will was still just as confused as he had been then.

Will feels like he needs to do something to ease the tension, so he allows himself to follow his instincts, his empathy telling him to touch. He reaches out like he had that night and strokes a finger down the back of Hannibal's hand. Hannibal doesn't breathe. Will searches his face for a reason, but finds nothing, his mask back in place once the contact stops.

"I shall see you later, Will." Hannibal practically breathes his name.

“Goodnight, Hannibal."

It goes on like this for weeks: dinner, working together, drinks by the fire during Will’s scheduled “appointment” time. Stolen glances and looks that last longer than is generally considered socially acceptable, conversations that vary in depth, but are never surface level. The mutual giving of personal information instead of it being one-sided like it was in the beginning.

Hannibal never looks away from him, drinking him in like he’s a tall glass of water on a hot day. It’s the only way to accurately describe it, and it makes Will’s head spin, makes hope blossom dangerously in his heart where it shouldn’t, where it has no right to.

He learns that Hannibal had enjoyed Depeche Mode in his youth, and still sometimes listens to their records when he’s cleaning because he refuses to have anyone clean his house despite having the means to never lift a finger.

Will recounts tales of his first love - fishing, and how he used to sneak out early in the morning just to have some peace and quiet away from his chaotic home.

He learns that Hannibal had a sister, *Mischa* - and he had said her name so softly that Will had to strain to hear him. He learns that Hannibal had spent time in an orphanage for almost four years until they located his uncle after his parents had died, and how his uncle had never been the fatherly type. Will tells him about his mother, or lack thereof, and about how he had to take care of his drunk father while simultaneously being his verbal punching bag.

“I look just like her, apparently,” Will says one night after dinner as they sit in plush chairs in Hannibal’s study. “He didn’t like that.”

“Mischa and I looked very similar, as well. Same hair and eyes, but she had our mother’s nose where I had our father’s.”

Will takes in everything he learns with greedy enthusiasm. He wonders how many people have been privileged enough to know these things about the other man. The more he learns, the more the little things Will has picked up on over the months start to make sense - his need for absolute cleanliness and order, his need for control, his ability and desire to care for Will.

With a stroke of jealousy Will wishes he didn’t have, he wonders, too, how many people Hannibal takes care of like this, but the answer is there for the taking. He cooks for many, caters to many. Will isn’t special despite how close they’d become, and he needs to remember that.

Despite that, he knows in his heart of hearts that what Hannibal shares with Will has not been shared with many. Will, even with his overactive empathy, doesn’t know what to make of

that. He should know, but there's something preventing him from it. He's loath to remove whatever obstacle it is - this friendship means so much to him, means everything.

To ruin it over something like his stupid feelings would only ruin everything else in his life.

A week later, Hannibal is once again sipping wine while he watches Will cook in a strange, but welcome, reversal of their usual roles. Will is making another one of his childhood favorites - bacon wrapped chicken with scalloped cheesy potatoes and steamed broccoli. It's simple and inelegant, but filling and delicious.

Throughout dinner, Will catches Hannibal looking at him thoughtfully on more than one occasion. Each time, he wants to hide away from the intense attention.

After the fifth time, Will asks, "Something on your mind?"

"You," Hannibal says simply. Will's heart stops. "This is not the first time you've cooked this. You make it like you've done it a thousand times."

Will chuckles. "Maybe not a thousand."

"You make this often?"

Will shrugs. "I used to. My dad wasn't much of a cook. Someone had to if I didn't want to live off of frozen TV dinners."

Hannibal nods sagely. "You took care of him. More than he took care of you, I'd wager."

Will nods. He doesn't like remembering those times. His childhood had barely been that. "It's okay," he sighs. "Shit happens."

"Is that phrase your usual coping mechanism?"

"It is, actually."

Hannibal's hand finds his over the table. Will stops breathing. "I'm sorry, Will."

Will grimaces. "I don't need your pity," Will says bitterly, taking his hand away. He puts his fork down.

Hannibal is staring at his own hand, empty now. "I don't pity you," he responds honestly. He still hasn't moved his hand. "I understand a childhood lost. It is something we can never get back, and the pain we experienced is never something that is truly gone."

Great. Now Will feels like an asshole. He closes his eyes, and when he opens them, Hannibal is staring at him beseechingly. Will can feel his face soften.

“I’m sorry.” He reaches his hand back, tentatively, towards Hannibal’s, right where he had left it. He’s warm, his hand slightly larger than Will’s own, and it feels like it encompasses Will’s entirely when Hannibal laces their fingers together and continues to eat.

Friends do this. Right?

The rest of their meal passes by in silence. Their hands stay intertwined on top of the etched wood of Will’s table.

Friends don’t do this.

Will can feel sweat gathering at the small of his back and prays to any god that may be listening that his palms aren’t clammy.

After they eat and do the dishes together, as has become their routine, Will takes the familiar steps in reluctantly walking Hannibal to his door.

“Thank you for dinner, Will. It was delicious.”

Will runs a hand over the back of his neck and looks down at their feet. They’re so close together that the tips of their shoes are only a few inches away from touching. “You’re just saying that to be polite. But you’re welcome.”

Hannibal tuts. “I’m saying it because it is the truth. I am polite to polite company. My social niceties only extend to those I am not close with. I am close with you, therefore I am honest.”

“Still polite, though.”

“Would you like me to be impolite?”

“If you’re capable?”

Hannibal leans in. Will’s heart stops once again, his breath becoming shallow. Is Hannibal going to …?

Fuck. He is.

When Will doesn’t pull away, Hannibal takes that as permission granted.

The next thing Will knows is the soft press of warm, slightly wet lips against his own, shy and hesitant like Hannibal is scared Will would be repulsed. Will is many things at the moment – startled, surprised, floating out of his skin – but repulsed is not one of them.

His face and body are heating to a boil. Everywhere there is a nerve, there is a flame. Hannibal’s mouth is plush and promising and completely fucking perfect.

The contact is lost all too soon.

“Was that impolite enough for you?” Hannibal asks, slightly out of breath even though the kiss had lasted only a few seconds.

Will can't think. His brain has shut down. "I …" Will looks from Hannibal's lips to his eyes and back again with quick flicks of his blue eyes. "You like me?" he asks stupidly.

Regardless of his inane question, Hannibal's face is reverent, and slightly amused, Will realizes. And how long has he missed something so obvious? This expression, directed towards Will, is not new. He realizes with a start that this has been the normal for a long time.

"How could you not know?" Hannibal asks him softly, then gives a soft chuckle. "Have you not been courting me?"

Will balks. "W-what, I … um. I mean," Will says eloquently.

Hannibal, in response, licks his lips slowly and leans in again, eyes never leaving Will's. Will is thankful to have an excuse to shut his bumbling mouth. Neither of the men close their eyes until soft contact is made once more, and both gasp at it. Will slides his hand up to Hannibal's cheek, cupping it and angling his head so he can slot their mouths together, closing his eyes at last.

In the beginning, it's soft, exploratory. Just a sliding of lips over lips and soft, wet sounds as they pucker and flex for a taste. But then Will feels a tongue swipe over his lips and he gives a soft groan, opening to Hannibal who groans, too, when their tongues finally meet. It rumbles through Will's chest and sets him alight, heart and groin tightening.

The sound of something dropping to the floor. Hannibal has dropped his coat.

Both hands free now, he uses them to pull Will needily closer, chest to chest, hip to hip, a hand coming up to sink into the soft curls on the back of Will's head. Hannibal is gripping him like he's scared Will is going to pull away. His lips work fervently against his own, and Will is lost in the sensation of it.

They make out for long moments, going from soft, lippy sips of their mouths to downright tonguing at each other. Will's body is positively vibrating with the need to escalate things, but he holds himself back. Thoughts separate from actions.

Hannibal seems to have no such compunctions and walks them backwards until Will hits the wall next to the door. Hannibal moans into his mouth and scoots closer, brazenly rubbing his hard crotch against Will's with slow, deep drags of his hips. Will bites at Hannibal's upper lip in reward and grips his trim waist, pulling him in and rutting up against him as they kiss.

When their lips are chapped and their lungs are deprived of oxygen, they part, resting their foreheads against one another and panting for the same air.

"I hope," Hannibal pants and tries again, licking at his dry lips. "I hope that was sufficiently impolite."

"You …" Will's mind is still offline, but god help him, he's trying. "I thought I was imagining things. Seeing things that weren't really there."

Hannibal nuzzles his forehead against Will's throat. "I assure you, Will. They were there."

“Well. That was … definitely sufficient,” Will jokes, smiling and so, so happy and maybe a little hard and definitely a little wet.

Hannibal looks much the same. His grin is almost goofy. “What’s to be done about that?” he asks, pressing his hot lips to Will’s pulse.

“Lunch tomorrow?” He can’t help but lean in again for another kiss, then another. Hannibal doesn’t deny him.

Hannibal’s grin deepens as he responds to the kisses. “Sounds lovely,” he says against Will’s mouth. “I have a two hour break between patients tomorrow, between eleven and one. I’ll bring something to Quantico for us?” He kisses along Will’s throat, licking at his Adam’s apple slowly and with great care. Will ruts his hips against his again.

“I’d like that,” Will agrees. He stills feels the sticky warmth of Hannibal’s saliva on his lips and he can’t quite believe they just made out like teenagers. Will reluctantly bends down to grab Hannibal’s coat with a sigh and helps him into it. Hannibal is looking at him with stars in his eyes.

It’s … familiar. He can’t believe he missed it all this time.

The doctor leans in for yet another kiss, this time gentle and chaste. “Thank you again, Will. For dinner and the company.”

“You’re welcome. I had … it’s always nice with you.”

“It is.”

The quiet between them stretches on, but not uncomfortably. They look at each other, still smiling like idiots, until finally Hannibal looks away, almost shyly. It’s the first time he ever has, Will notes.

“Goodnight, Will.”

“Goodnight, Hannibal.” The man in question’s eyes light up with the use of his first name, almost ruby in the dim light of his living room. “Let me know when you get home safe.”

“I will.”

An hour and half later, Will gets a text.

Home safely. I look forward to seeing you tomorrow, Will.

Even just seeing his written name from Hannibal is enough to bring a flush to his face, and a smile to his lips so wide it makes his cheeks hurt. He bites his lower lip as he replies.

Same. Sweet dreams.

Will sends it and presses his screen off, setting his alarm on the clock by his bed for the next day. For the first time in a long, long time, he falls asleep feeling happy.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Will's doubts set in after that scrumptious kiss. The boys have a chat over lunch.

Chapter Notes

Ehh this chapter feels meh to me, but important things for the plot happen so. I read it and reread it so many times that my eyes bleed just looking at it, so here it is. Now beta read as of 6/23. Thanks freshbrian!!! Much love <3 And also a thank you to everyone who left kudos and comments. They mean the world to me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The following morning, Will wakes up and sinks further into his mattress with a heavy sigh. He feels different. It's not the kind of different he thought he would feel. It's a sinking feeling. The overwhelming joy from the previous night is gone; replaced with unwelcome, but expected (if he's honest with himself) dread.

He doesn't know what he was thinking. He's shit at relationships, for Christ's sake and he had just maybe, possibly, definitely entered into one with the only person in this world he can't afford to lose.

Will sighs heavily and stares at the ceiling. This is, most likely, a Bad Idea.

Time and time again, his personality had scared people off. Sometimes literally run them in the opposite direction. The mask of a waspish, twitchy man can only stay in place for so long before the comfort of intimacy allows it to slip away. Once he feels like he can trust, once he gets comfortable, the relationship falls apart.

Another wonderful thing to add to his laundry list of defects, and perhaps the most prevalent - his empathy. His blessing and his curse. It makes a difficult life that much harder, always struggling to remain separate from his partner and not become some Frankenstein version of a build-a-bear boyfriend. He impetuously becomes everything he can feel they need and completely forgets himself. There is not a reality that exists where Will doesn't *see.* Without wanting to, an innocent statement of fact becomes a mountain of issues. He'll see a thread and, like a curious child, pull it loose to see how long it is, where it originates from.

He's learned over the years that people like their threads to remain exactly where they are: unseen and unknown and left the hell alone, but Will never had the ability to leave well

enough alone. Always pulling, always seeing, always pushing too far.

The list goes on.

There is a reason he is utterly alone.

And Hannibal … Hannibal is his closest friend. His truest friend. The greatest friend he's had in decades, maybe ever. There had been his partner in New Orleans, Dwayne, who he'd become close with on the force, but that was nothing compared to what he had with Hannibal.

There was no hiding, no reason to hide - Hannibal accepted everything about him with an ease that Will sometimes found suspicious. There was no part of himself that he had to cordon off. Hannibal wasn't afraid of his mind, never shied away from it even when he was on the receiving end of it.

He could still sense Hannibal was holding something close to his chest, but it didn't bother him because so was Will. He would see it in time provided he didn't fuck everything up before then.

Deep in the heart of him lay the last remaining piece, shrouded by protective mist and buried behind everything else. Not necessarily a secret, just something he doesn't consider important enough to proclaim. He hasn't breathed a word of it to anyone; not Bev, not Jack, not even Hannibal. His empathy is all over him, on his sleeve, in his eyes. This little tidbit is nestled just inside, just for him.

His anatomy, the journey he's undertaken to have the outside match the inside. He greatly enjoys making subtle jokes that no one else picks up on. It's his private treasure.

Eventually, whether Will tells Hannibal or not, he is going to find out. Will honestly doesn't know what Hannibal's response will be. Is he strictly dick-ley? Would he mind what Will's genitals look like? Would he be polite and keep up the charade of dating Will only to slow and eventually cease all communication, or would he be a proper gentleman and immediately, but politely, call things to an end?

Will should be worried that the only outcomes he sees are an end. It just goes to show how broken he is. Hannibal doesn't need to put up with that, doesn't need a broken pony in his stable, because that's all Will feels like he is to everyone.

Losing Hannibal is not something he thinks he can survive, but he can't deny that he's deeply in love with the one person who sees him and isn't fucking *afraid* of him, treating him like shattered glass mended with cheap glue.

Going back now would ruin their friendship, most likely. Going forward has a similar likelihood.

Will allows himself to think of a scenario where he tells Hannibal he'd prefer to stay friends and immediately feels sick to his stomach. Hannibal has looked at him like he had last night for, Will now realizes, a very long time: affectionate, fond, entirely lovesick. He had not

kissed him like he was going to see him the next day for lunch, he had kissed him like he was going off to war.

This isn't just a crush, not for either of them, Will thinks. This feels distinctly serious, and he knows Hannibal treats things that matter to him very seriously. Which means that, in spite of everything that could go wrong and leave Will heartbroken, if not broken-broken, he has to try. He has to take this seriously, too.

He needs to remember that Hannibal is a grown ass man and can make decisions for himself, and he seems pretty decided on Will. For now. It would be completely unfair of him to take Hannibal's choice away. If he wants a broken pony, he certainly has one. For how long, Will doesn't know. He doesn't want to think about it. He'll just have to take what he can get.

Maybe there's a chance it won't end badly. Just maybe they will work out. They'll move in together, get married, adopt a kid or five - all of the things Will has never allowed himself to envision for his life. Things he has always felt undeserving of.

He seriously doubts it, doubts this won't end but one way, but for Hannibal, he'll try not to sabotage everything before it truly begins.

"I want a detailed paper on your profile of Michael Fletch, outlining each characteristic followed by a description of why you would assign it to him. APA format, make it professional. I'm not giving you a page or word count. If you can be succinct, but descriptive, you'll get a better grade."

Out of the corner of his eye, he sees a figure he didn't notice before standing in the entry hall. Will bites back his smile. Despite the knee jerk joy Hannibal's sudden presence elicited, his stomach flutters nervously.

"Due Monday. Class dismissed. Try not to get too drunk over the weekend," he jokes with his students, eliciting a few chuckles. Will barely notices, though. His eyes are locked onto Hannibal's approaching form and his students take notice of this, eyeing the newcomer with curiosity, noting how close he stands to their tetchy professor. Will can already feel the gossip train starting its descent.

"I do so enjoy watching you teach," Hannibal remarks softly. He's holding two glass containers in his large hands, smiling intimately at Will with his eyes. Bringing him lunch to work all feels terribly domestic. Will's stomach rumbles with hunger and anxiety.

He gives a self-deprecating huff, dipping his head low to hide how Hannibal lights him up from the inside out with just his smile, and replies, "I wish *they* would. Three of them fell asleep on me today."

Hannibal purses his lips. “Not very becoming for future FBI agents, but not very surprising when it comes to college students.”

Will hums in response as he gathers his things, desperately trying to get a lid on his nerves. He can feel Hannibal watching him as he goes about his task of shoving things unceremoniously into his messenger bag, but he doesn’t have the stomach to meet his gaze just yet.

When he’s packed up a moment later, he gives a furtive glance around before he greets Hannibal with a swift kiss on the cheek, blushing and still flitting his gaze from the other man’s eyes. “It’s nice to see you. Thank you for bringing lunch.”

If Hannibal sees how twitchy Will is being, he is polite enough not to comment. “It is my genuine pleasure, Will,” Hannibal responds. His eyes caress over Will’s face with feather-light touches and Will bites his lower lip and chances a look up. Hannibal’s smile widens when their eyes finally meet.

He’s dressed in his customary three piece; today’s choice – the dark blue with lighter blue windowpane check and a purple paisley tie with a yellow shirt. He has no business pulling off such an outfit.

But he does. Will’s heart skips.

“Let’s go to my office. I hope you’re not claustrophobic.”

“Luckily, I am not.”

Will leads Hannibal the short distance away to his pantry of an office, and on the way there asks him, “Did you ever fall asleep in class?”

Hannibal smirks. “Never.”

Will laughs, feeling shy as Hannibal barely watches where he’s going in order to keep looking at Will. “Didn’t think so. Not the typical college student, then, were you?”

Hannibal shrugs. “I strived to be excellent in everything I did. I also kept a regular sleep schedule and never over exerted myself.”

Will wonders what a young Hannibal looked like, acted like. He wonders if they would have been friends. “I should have taken lessons from you. I was at university on scholarship and was always scared of my grades falling below the line for me to stay. I overexerted myself plenty.”

“I have always taken you to be very studious,” Hannibal replies as they reach Will’s office. Will opens the door and closes it behind them to give them some privacy away from curious eyes. “You’re very intelligent. Very focused on the things that matter to you.”

Heh, Will thinks with a silent, hysterical chuckle, recalling how he hasn’t been able to stop thinking about Hannibal since they met.

Hannibal has no fucking idea just how *focused* Will can be.

“I wanted to excel, too. I wanted to be better than everyone else,” Will admits. “Those who did fall asleep and those who did little work for all the credit. I wanted to really earn my place there. Scholarships felt like charity.”

“I imagine that comes from how you were raised, as part of a working class family. I know my own drive did.”

“How so?” Will asks curiously.

Hannibal sets their meals down on Will’s desk and unbuttons his jacket with a single flick of his fingers as he sits down in one of the plastic chairs that came with the office. “I never wanted for anything while my parents were alive, and then later when I was with my Uncle Robertas. I never had to work hard for what I received, never had to earn it. I wanted to.”

Will smiles at him. “That’s not so different from my situation, I guess.”

Hannibal smiles back. “Not so different, and yet, completely so. I would say that describes us to a tee, don’t you?”

“I would,” Will agrees, enjoying the way Hannibal casually uses the idiom that Will so often uses. It strokes something possessive inside of him to hear it come from the older man’s mouth, seemingly without thought.

Dangerous. Very dangerous. Will looks down at the glass container Hannibal brought with him. “What are we having?”

“I didn’t know if you’d have a way to reheat lunch, so I made caprese salad with a side of cold cuts, as well as roasted potato wedges with lemon, garlic, and paprika.”

“I have a microwave. For future reference.”

Hannibal pinches his mouth cutely. “As I said.”

Will chuckles and unthinkingly leans over his desk to kiss Hannibal’s cheek. “Sounds amazing. I’m starving.”

“Help yourself,” Hannibal blushes, honest to god blushes. Will feels alive with such a reaction to himself of all people from the usually unflappable doctor.

He gathers himself back up with frightening speed and uncaps Will’s portion before his own and sets out silverware, also setting Will’s out for him before setting out his own. It’s such typical Hannibal behavior that Will has to smile, even with the information he needs to share settling uncomfortably in his stomach.

As they’re sitting down to eat, and taking their first bites, Will breaks the comfortable silence. “Hannibal, we need to talk about something.”

The older man pauses all movement, looks up, face suspiciously blank. “Then let us talk,” he says, crisply undoing his napkin and setting it on his lap, not looking at Will. Will thinks the other man’s focus on the food is more than what it usually is.

He needs to get this out quickly - he doesn’t want Hannibal thinking the worst, but the words clog up his throat, like he took a bite too big to swallow of something too sticky to go down smoothly.

“How, um. How familiar are you with transgender people?” Will asks hesitantly.

At the question, something seems to relax in Hannibal. He lets out a soft breath and Will wonders if that is the older man’s version of a sigh of relief. If Will weren’t looking for it, he would have missed it.

Will frowns softly. What did Hannibal think he was going to say?

“I’d say I’m familiar. I’ve had patients that are transgender, which called for research so I’d be up to date on information surrounding the subject. I have written a few papers detailing why it is unsuitable for treatment to refer to it as a disorder instead of treating the surrounding familial and childhood trauma of growing up in such a fashion, and I also dated a woman briefly who identified as such, as well as a non-binary individual.”

It’s a relief to hear, even as jealousy sparks along the nerves in his chest. “Okay. Good, that’s good.”

Hannibal looks at him with a *go on* type of look. Will swallows. “I was assigned female at birth,” he blurts out under his breathe in an anxious jumble, hedging a glance to see Hannibal’s reaction.

There isn’t an awkward pause, a blink of surprise, not even a raise of his eyebrows. Hannibal takes in this new information like he does everything else about Will. Easily.

“Thank you for trusting me with that,” he says simply. It’s everything Will can do to stop himself from crying at such easy acceptance, at not having to defend himself or sell himself as someone worthy of a relationship just like anyone else would be.

“You’re … that doesn’t change anything for you, then?” Will asks, suspicious.

Hannibal frowns. He almost looks offended. “It changes nothing. Not how I see you and,” he pauses, licks his lips, “not how much I … enjoy your company,” he says, giving Will such a heartfelt and gentle look that it makes his heart stumble and clench painfully.

“Have you ever … been with someone like me? A transman, I mean? Like … intimately?” He doesn’t know why he’s asking, but he asks anyway. It’s too late to take it back.

“I have not,” Hannibal says, taking a delicate bite of his salad. Will watches the way his plush lips wrap around the silver tines of his fork, how his jaw works as he chews. “It will be a learning curve, but I am a quick learner,” he winks.

Will flushes red.

So. That's that, then.

Lunch continues with lighter conversation. Hannibal doesn't ask the usual questions when he tells someone: when did you know, how does it feel, have you had any surgeries. He doesn't say the typical remarks of personal bravery that Will absolutely loathes. He just accepts it like he does everything else about him, and they move on.

"Tell me about your first love," Will says. He would never ask such a brazen and personal question like this to just anyone, but Hannibal isn't just anyone, and he wants to even out the playing field just a little bit after his own personal admission, even if he's not quite sure he wants to learn about any of the past people Hannibal has been with. He needs to think of something else.

Hannibal, as always, indulges him. "What would you like to know?"

Will shrugs. "Whatever you're comfortable sharing and nothing more."

"You are going to judge me."

"I'll do no such thing," Will volleys.

"Alright," Hannibal says after taking a breath, likely for dramatic flair and not actual nervousness. "My first love was my aunt," he says without aplomb.

Will chokes on his bite of salad. Hannibal looks at him knowingly.

"Told you so," Hannibal smirks. It's a childish statement, but it sounds so damn charming curled up in Hannibal's aristocratic accent. Will can't help but fall in love with him just a little more. "We were not related by blood. She hailed from Japan, and was barely older than I, at the time."

"You could have worked on the delivery," Will grumbles, wiping his mouth. "I think you just wanted to get a reaction out of me."

"Indeed. Your reactions are quite lovely," he flirts.

Will blushes. Jesus, this man.

Hannibal continues as they eat. Will loves that Hannibal now talks to him with food tucked politely into his cheek, a slow removal of his polite outer stitchings. "She showed me much of Japanese culture, even combat techniques, and I in turn was a distraction from her loveless marriage. We grew very close."

Will wants to ask exactly how close, but even he isn't that rude. Instead he asks, "What happened?"

Hannibal swallows his bite and delicately wipes at his mouth, taking a sip of water. "What I was, was not compatible with who she was. I was a very angry young man, and I attacked someone who wronged her. I frightened her."

Will nods, intimately understanding such a situation and not at all put off by what Hannibal has just confessed. “I can understand that.”

Hannibal pauses his fork en route to his mouth. Sets it back down. The look on his face is indiscernible. “Do I frighten you, Will?”

It’s Will’s turn to frown. “No. No, that isn’t what I meant. I mean that I scare people off, too,” he reassures the doctor. It works, and Hannibal nods as he continues his bite.

“May I ask?”

Will nods. “Maybe it's for the best that you know.” *Just in case you want to run while I’ll still let you.* Will blinks at the sudden thought, frowning at himself. “I tend to fall in the deep end rather quickly. My empathy … it makes it hard to differentiate between me and them. I can bring out the worst in people, aspects of themselves they didn’t know they had. And, they can see mine. Aspects I know I have, but hide.”

Hannibal listens to him with rapt attention, tilting his head just so. “Are you trying to scare me off, Will?”

“Is it working?” Will huffs without amusement.

“I’m afraid not. You will need to try much harder than that, and even then, it will likely not work.” Hannibal reaches across the table to lay his hand over Will’s, gripping tight like he does when Will is wading through the minds of the deranged. It’s more comforting than he expects it to be when Hannibal laces their fingers together. “I’d prefer it if you didn’t try.”

The fears he’d had upon waking swirl violently in his mind, catching on the jagged edges of his conscience. “I never have to try,” Will says sadly.

Hannibal brings the hand he’s gripping up to his lips, softening his grip and bestowing Will’s palm with a tender press of his lips. “You inspire fear in me, Will, but not the kind you are thinking.”

He kisses his palm again, and sets in gently back down, but doesn’t say anything else. He doesn’t have to for Will to understand what he fears, because they are the same as his own.

After they finish eating their lunch, Will helps stack everything and Hannibal places it into a paper bag he pulls out of his briefcase. The gesture is so endearing that Will can’t help but smile even after such an emotionally charged conversation.

Hannibal hesitates at the door, looking uncharacteristically unsure of himself as Will comes to stand beside him. Will rolls his eyes fondly and leans in to kiss his lips. “You can kiss me, you know.”

“I didn’t know if you would be comfortable,” Hannibal replies, cupping Will’s cheeks and bringing him in for a firmer kiss.

Against Hannibal’s lips, Will observes, “The door is closed."

“So it is.” They continue exchanging soft caresses of their lips, can’t seem to stop now that they have permission to indulge. “Tell me, Will; is this something only for closed doors, then?”

Will gently breaks the kiss, leaning away to meet Hannibal's intense gaze. “Maybe just for now. I don’t want to give these people more reason to talk. And. Maybe it’s selfish, but I want this to be just for us for a little while. These people don’t even know I’m trans,” he rambles. “I promise you, it’s not because I’m ashamed, or embarrassed, or anything like that. I don’t give a shit what they think of me, but I care what they think of you.”

Oops. He hadn’t meant to say that last part.

Hannibal steps back, observing him. “And what do you mean by that?” He asks, most likely already knowing the answer.

Will sighs. “Haven’t we talked about enough deep shit for one day?”

“I think we can stand to talk about one more.”

Will almost rolls his eyes, but that would be rude, and undeserving. “I just. You’re you. And I’m me.”

“Meaning?”

Will licks his lips nervously. “You wear tailored three piece suits. I wear clothes that are off the bargain rack at department stores. You’re a social butterfly, your very presence commands the room. I’m a shadow. They won’t ask how we met, or how we got together, they’ll ask what I did to deserve a man like you." Will sighs and looks away. "Or worse, they’ll ask what *you* did to deserve a man like *me*. They’ll think I’m using you or … I don’t know,” he finishes with a huff, dragging his hand over his face with frustration, not aimed at Hannibal, but at himself.

"Will, I know what it looks like when others are more interested in my money rather than my person. You don't strike me as the type."

"They won't know that."

Hannibal nods thoughtfully. “What I’m hearing is that you do ‘give a shit’ what they think of you. And me, by association.”

The curse is so different to what he was expecting that it momentarily stuns him out of his own pity party, inciting a sharp and sudden laugh. Hannibal smiles at him, tension broken.

“Are you psychoanalyzing me?” Will asks without any bite.

“Difficult to avoid,” Hannibal volleys. The rest of the tension leaves Will’s shoulders, and subsequently, Hannibal’s. “Will. Nothing would make me happier than holding your hand in public, just as you are, and just as I am. But only when you’re ready, and not a moment sooner. Just know that I do want this, with you, and I’m not ashamed of you.”

“Guess that means … are we dating?” Will asks dumbly. He feels his face heat the moment the words leave his stupid mouth.

Hannibal chuffs. “I’d like us to be.” Then he adds, as if he needs to, “Exclusively.”

Will sucks his lips between his teeth. “I would also like us to be. Exclusively.”

“Then we are.” Hannibal leans in hesitantly for another kiss, lingering and soft, before pulling away. “Do you have any plans tomorrow?”

“No, but I feel I’m about to.”

Hannibal grins at him, biting at his lower lip. “Have dinner with me tomorrow night.”

Will leans in and kisses Hannibal’s lips. “I’d love to,” he whispers against them.

Hannibal practically melts under the sweet gesture, kissing him back. “I’ll let you get back to work. Be at my home at seven thirty.”

“Okay. Have a good day,” Will says lamely instead of what he wishes he could say, which is for Hannibal not to leave, ever.

He reaches for the doorknob without looking at it, still looking at Hannibal, still standing close, and opens the door to his office –

– Only to see Beverly Katz standing on the other side with a shit eating grin on her face.

Will internally moans his annoyance and considers slamming the door in her face. He stops himself only because he knows Hannibal would disapprove.

Will’s office door wasn’t exactly made for noise cancellation. He groans and curses under his breath. So much for that.

“Will. Dr. Lecter,” she smirks. “Jack needs you in the morgue, Will. You weren’t answering your phone,” she says, glancing pointedly at Hannibal’s way.

Will flounders for an excuse. “Dr. Lecter and I were …” *making out* “having lunch,” he finishes lamely. Her smirk deepens. “I’m right behind you,” he tells her quickly, shooing her off.

She grins again, and looks at Hannibal. “Dr. Lecter, always a pleasure.”

“Ms. Katz,” he replies with a conspiratorial smirk.

“See you soon, Will,” she says, still smirking, and then turns around and leaves, heels clicking on the linoleum flooring as she goes.

Will turns to Hannibal with a grimace. “I'm sorry about that.”

“Nothing to be sorry over," Hannibal responds. His expression is light and easy like he doesn't have a single care in the world for what just happened. He probably enjoyed it.

“She probably heard us confirming our relationship status,” Will grumbles.

“Most likely," Hannibal shrugs. "I’m sure she can be discreet.”

“Yeah. When she wants to be,” Will says, his face contorting with bemused displeasure.

When Will looks at Hannibal again, Hannibal is staring at him fondly. He wants to kiss him once more, but the door is wide open. Nerves sing in his stomach and he forgets why he cared in the first place.

Fuck it, he thinks, and gives Hannibal a quick peck on the lips, squashing their noses together awkwardly in his haste. A passing gaggle of students sees this and balks at the infamously tetchy, twitchy professor smooching a handsome stranger in his office.

Will sucks his lips between his teeth. He can still taste Hannibal there. Embarrassment makes itself known, but not for the reason he thought it would. He isn't sure he wants his students to know he has a romantic life. “Thanks again for lunch. Bye,” he says hurriedly, fleeing down the hallway to the morgue.

As he's jogging down the hall, Hannibal smiles after the profiler, utterly charmed. The students staring at him receive a polite nod. He leaves Quantico with a pep in his step, light as a feather.

Will jogs to catch up with Bev in the hallway, holding his satchel down as it bumps against his leg. “Real subtle,” he snips with the ease of old friends. Their usual banter consists of sarcastic remarks and gentle ribbing, so he knows it won’t be taken too seriously. Even though part of him wishes it would be.

“Speak for yourself. Lunch with Dr. Lecter? With the door closed?” She puts her tongue in her cheek. “*Very* subtle, Graham.”

“I didn’t want students popping in while I was enjoying my thirty minutes of peace and quiet.” Will says, and it’s not exactly a lie, so he doesn’t feel too bad. “How long were you standing out there, anyway?”

Bev shrugs. “A few seconds. Why, you worried I might have overheard something?”

“No,” he replies quickly. “Just curious how long you were being a creep.”

“Oh relax. I saw his car in the parking lot, and I figured he was here to see you or Jack, and since he wasn’t with Jack, well. Then, I saw your door closed. Doesn’t take an FBI agent to figure it out.” She turns to him, smirk gone and replaced with genuine affection. “Are you … ?”

Will considers playing dumb, lying, but the last thing he wants is for Hannibal to feel like a dirty secret. As much as he wanted to keep this under wraps for as long as possible, it was only a matter of time before he knew people in an FBI setting would figure it out. Especially someone as nosey as Beverly.

They haven’t even been dating for a whole five minutes, and already the cat was out of the bag. Will grimaces, not at all comfortable with this turn of events.

Beverly must sense his reluctance to talk, but her face doesn’t change. She doesn’t treat him like he’s made of glass and that’s why he likes her.

“Hey, look, forget I asked,” she says. Will knows she means well and that’s the only reason his smile isn’t completely forced. “I won’t say a word of it to anyone if you don’t want me to.”

“You promise?” Will asks like they’re in fifth grade. “We literally only agreed today that we were,” he takes a furtive glance around the empty hallway, “dating. I just. I wanted to keep it quiet until things got serious so I didn’t make a fool out of myself and get pity looks if he dumps me. Plus, no one knows I’m … into guys.”

“I’d say. I wasn’t expecting that. I can't say I'm entirely surprised, though."

Will frowns. "And why is that?"

She gives him a disbelieving look. "The way he looks at you? Always seeking you out? You're the surprise, not him."

Will's heart flutters. All this time. He had been pining away like a lovestruck teenager all this time, hurting over unreachable fantasies needlessly. They both have because he had been too scared to say anything.

"I’ll tell you a secret since you shared one.”

“- It was hardly *sharing*,” Will mutters under his breath.

“I’m a lesbian,” she whispers loudly.

Will turns his head to look at her and gives her a long up and down glance. “That’s not a secret,” Will mock whispers back with a tiny smirk, feeling a little better about the situation. He trusted Bev to, at least, not say anything.

Beverly smacks him hard enough on the arm that he winces and they laugh good naturedly. “Why do you think he’s going to dump you?” Will gives her his best *are you fucking kidding*

me look to which Beverly levels her own right back at him. “What? You’re a catch. If I was straight, I’d totally be into you. Plus you’re like, weirdly charming. When you’re not being a complete grouch.”

Will doesn’t deign to answer such an obvious question.

When they get to the morgue, Jack, Price, and Zeller are already there, as well as a body on the table: a Caucasian female, mid fifties. Pretty. She has a large slit across her throat from jugular to jugular.

Jimmy is snapping a few protocol pictures while Zeller catalogs her external injuries. Jack stares at him as Will enters the room and sets his stuff down where everyone else has.

“Will. I was trying to call you.” His displeasure echoes off the walls, making his words seem louder than they truly were.

Will shakes off the other man’s disappointment and gives a perfunctory apology, but that’s all he offers. He doesn’t offer an explanation or lame excuses because he and Hannibal have been working on that little issue - with only responding with what’s necessary and not making a case for yourself unless prompted. Jack glares at him disapprovingly, but Will is still riding the high from his and Hannibal’s conversation and can’t be bothered to care.

"Why didn't you bring Dr. Lecter?" Jack asks. Will shoots Bev a glare from across the room to which she quickly looks away from, studying the body with more intent than is really needed.

"He had to get back to work," Will says firmly, snapping on a pair of gloves. “What do we got?”

Price gives his usual peppy description of the dead body. “Found in the parking lot down at a local independent pharmacy this morning, on the hood of her car, spread eagle and dressed to the nines. For all intents and purposes, it looked like she was sunbathing.”

“Cause of death is exsanguination,” adds Zeller.

Will acknowledges Zeller’s proclamation with little more than a slight nod. Will walks over the where photographs are scattered over a clean table, studying them as well as the open file on the vic. He notices that it’s very slim. Not much information on her or the scene, it seems. He wishes he could have seen it for himself, but this will have to do.

The pictures are clean, as clean as the body, as if they had taken pictures of a woman sleeping on the hood of her car. “Blood would have ruined the display,” Will observes to himself, thinking out loud. Jack was about to ask him to get into the head of whoever did this, and Hannibal was, sadly, at his practice. He’d have to wade back out of this mind alone today. He was mostly confident that he could.

“No obvious blood stains on her clothes,” agrees Price. “Not even obvious wounds aside from her neck. She has a scar on her abdomen, but it looks surgical. Dissolvable sutures and it looks to have healed well enough for the amount of time she was alive post surgery.”

“Do we have her medical records?” Will asks.

“No, still waiting on those,” says Beverly. “Might be a few days even though I put a rush on it.”

Will looks back to the table containing the pictures, looking at one that shows a neat, vertical surgical incision just above her navel, at least two weeks healed by the looks of it. Price was right, it had healed well for the time it was given.

Photo still in hand, he walks towards the other agents where they stand around the well preserved corpse of Layla Hunt. Going up to the table, he gets a closer look, focusing on her abdomen where the scar is. Something feels familiar, here, but he can’t quite place it yet.

“If she's had a recent surgery, she’d still be recovering,” Will says. “Not out at a pharmacy in a ballroom gown, hair, nails, and makeup done, and with no dressings on the surgical wounds,” Will says. Something sparks in his mind, a puzzle piece beckoning to him. “Her scar looks different than in the picture. Looks … fresh. Look at the edges.”

Another piece. This wasn't random. This was a display. Will blinks. “We need to check her for missing organs.”

Zeller looks unimpressed. “What, you think this might be a Ripper vic?” he asks. Will stares at him unflinchingly. “She’s just had abdominal surgery. Of course she might be missing organs.”

“Open her up, Z,” Jack commands.

Everyone watches as Zeller rolls his eyes, but makes the usual Y incision along her chest and abdomen. Once the skin and fat have been peeled back, all four sets of eyes are watching as Zeller examines around the body cavity, moving intestines out of the way and poking here and there to see under her liver and stomach.

Will can already see two depressions on either side of the mass of organs where two kidneys should be in the posterior aspect. “He took her kidneys. Both of them. No surgeon would have taken both,” he remarks.

Sure enough, once Zeller pulls enough organs out of the way to reach the retroperitoneum, her kidneys are gone. Will feels vindicated, and allows some of it to bleed through. Zeller mutters a quiet *damn* under his breath.

“He used her surgical scar to hide his deeds,” Will explains. Looking back at the body, whispers of the Ripper float into his mind, twisting through his neurons like wind through leaves. He’s always found the Ripper to be a different sensation compared to the other killers that trample around his mind – tranquil and easy. The Ripper is the gentlest invasion, not welcome, but not unwelcome, either. “I hate to undo their hard work,” Will intones, voice dissonant, fractured, “but you have something I want.”

Beverly and Jack are used to his strange remarks by now, but Price and Zeller still startle back and give each other odd looks before turning them back to Will. He doesn’t care

anymore. He’s here to do one thing, and he’s doing it, even if how he does it freaks them out. That’s not his problem.

“There will be more, then?” Jack asks. “You say he kills in threes.”

Will honestly isn’t sure. “I don’t know. Maybe. This feels … different, doesn't it? This isn't as extravagant as his usual displays."

"But you are sure it's him?" Jack asks skeptically.

"I feel the Ripper, but he feels different to how he usually does.” Will licks his lips, stepping closer to the body. “This isn't like his usual kills. This is different, means something different to him. He may or may not complete his sounder.”

“Why would he all of a sudden change now?" Zeller asks.

Jack ignores him. "What feels different, Will?”

What does feel different? Something certainly does. It's soft, overflowing with promise. “This feels like a gift,” he says slowly, tasting the words as they come out of his mouth. “She’s done something, something beyond what he usually finds distasteful. This was … he feels like he’s doing a service. I mean, he always does, but this wasn’t just a pest.”

“That’s not his MO,” Jack says slowly, as if talking to a misbehaving child. Will knows he’s needling him, pushing for more, but he’s unsure of what else he can give. He can’t give something that isn’t there. “You know it’s not. You call them ‘pests he’s swatted.’ He’s not a vigilante.”

“No,” Will agrees, confused. “He’s not.” Images of the crime scene swirl in his mind, visible, but unseeable as if from a great distance. Maybe he is wrong.

“She has a clean record. No assaults, no robberies, not even a parking ticket. She’s never served jail time, or even been sued,” Jack states. Will knows all of this. He read the file, small as it was.

“It won’t be something the law picked up on,” he replies, shaking his head. He can still feel the Ripper inside his mind, stroking his way along Will’s nervous system. He puts his hands in his pockets so he can feel the bite of his nails into his palms without any curious looks, takes a deep breath and holds it before letting it out, closes his eyes and finds his stream. When he opens them, he's alone once again in his mind. “But the Ripper sure did.”

“You say this is a gift. To whom? To us? The pharmacy?”

Will shrugs at Jack. “To someone."

Jack sighs. Will tries to keep meeting his eyes, but eventually has to flick his eyes away. Jack's eyes are too serious, too unblinking for him to remain comfortable. Will longs to tug at the collar of his shirt. Jack's voice low as he asks, "Are you sure this is him, Will?"

Will wants to say yes. He felt the Ripper, clear as day, strolling about his neural pathways, bouncing off his mirror neurons. This is no copycat killer, he's sure of it. "We'll find something on her, I'm willing to bet my next paycheck on it," Will responds with finality, snapping his gloves off. "It's him."

"Will-"

"I have class in a few minutes," Will says hurriedly. "It's him, Jack. We'll keep an eye for more bodies, but something is telling me there won't be any."

"Go on, then," Jack rumbles. "And stay by your damn phone!"

A gift. But to whom? That is the question. Will imagines it as some unnamable object whirling around in his mind, trying to find purchase on something but unable to. It doesn't stick to anything, doesn't grasp. It's desperate to, but it can't.

An older male, forties or fifties, white but not American. Or an American who's under the delusion he's exotic somehow. Surgical know-how. An aptitude for the psychological. Theatrical with flourished artistry and metaphor. A sadist capable of masochism. An intelligent psychopath capable of higher emotion, but even that descriptor doesn't fit perfectly. It's not … tailored.

A sensitive psychopath. Hobbs had eaten his victims. The Ripper takes trophies … they've never figured out what he does with all of those organs. Will doubts he's keeping them in little formalin jars in his basement - too pedestrian.

A sensitive psychopath. An artistic psychopath.

He's eating them.

Will fumbles for his phone, all of the other thoughts and the connections he was making falling to the wayside in light of his newfound leap.

Jack answers on the fourth ring. It's late at night, but Will can't stop thinking about it.

"This better be important, Will."

"He's eating them, Jack. The Ripper. The trophies. He's eating them."

He hears the rustle of sleep clothes against sheets, likely he's getting out of bed so he doesn't wake his wife. Will stays in his bed where he's lain awake for hours, thinking.

"You sure about that?" Jack asks groggily.

"I'm sure."

A sigh on the other line, weary and troubled. “Great. Another cannibal.”

“Yeah. But at least we can add this to his profile. Someone - ”

Will stops himself. The Ripper wouldn’t make mediocre meals out of his trophies. He’s too sophisticated, too artistic. And what’s cooking but another form of art? Using offal in recipes isn’t unheard of with many cultures, and it just cements that the Ripper is exotic somehow, not just under the delusion that he is.

Reviewing his own profile of the killer, Will’s mind can’t help but make connections he doesn’t want it to.

“Someone, what?” Jack asks.

He can’t say it. It would be too obvious. “Someone who thinks they’re the top of the food chain. Embellished sense of self worth. That sort of thinking, to this degree, is hard to cover up with false charm. We’re one step closer.” It’s a half truth, the whole truth is … it’s …

Surgical know-how. *A hand inside of an abdominal cavity in the back of an ambulance.* A flair for the dramatic. *Killing must feel good to God too, and are we not created in his image?* An aptitude for the psychological. *Are you trying to alienate me from Jack Crawford?*

There is only one person he knows that fits his profile. Will blinks hard, blinks again. He doesn’t know many people. There are plenty of rich, uppity surgeons from other countries in the Baltimore medical district. It doesn’t have to mean anything.

Only it does.

“Yeah. Good work, Will. But try and get some rest. Think of something else. You did good. I’ll see you Monday. Or sooner if another body drops.” And with that, he hangs up. Will closes his phone off and settles deeper into his bed.

He regrets saying anything, but it can’t be helped now. He can go back on it, but it would only make him look incompetent, and if he’s going to steer the investigation away until he knows for sure, he’s going to need every ounce of Jack’s confidence.

Feelings and physical sensations are rising through him, but not the ones he was expecting. He wonders why he doesn’t feel disgusted, betrayed. He feels only a strange sense of peace and nothingness. Maybe he’s in shock. Maybe, sooner or later, the other shoe will drop and the reality will sink in heavy and unavoidable like wet concrete.

He thinks it’s not that, though. It’s something else. Some other reason as to why he feels … okay. It’s not something he wants to give further attention to, right now.

It’s Friday night. Well, technically, it’s Saturday morning. Will is scheduled to see Hannibal at his home later tonight for dinner. They can’t seem to spend one day apart. Finally something comes through the mesh - aching and poignant.

If his suspicions are correct, what would the Chesapeake Ripper want with Will?

What if all of this is fake?

It doesn't feel fake. It feels like the realest thing Will has ever had with someone. The way Hannibal looks at him isn't something that can be faked, not to Will, at least, with his overwhelming empathy. But maybe that's been taken into consideration? Maybe Hannibal really is just playing with him, blinding him. Because he knows he can catch him.

He supposes only time will tell. For now, he'll keep it close to his chest - his suspicions and his heart, caged in his forts like it was before Hannibal Lecter ever entered his life.

The next morning, he gets a call from Bev.

"So. Interesting finds."

Will frowns, trying and failing to blink the sleep out of his eyes. "About what?"

"About Layla Hunt, the vic from yesterday. She was a nurse at Johns Hopkins."

Will's frown deepens. "And that's interesting, why?" he asks grumpily, pulling the covers up to his chin and turning onto his side.

"It's interesting because suspicious things were happening to the patients under her care, but nothing was ever pinned on her. Medication mix ups, wrong dosages, this one guy died because he received too much insulin. And we have her signature on all of their medical papers. At first, I thought it was just a coincidence, but nine bodies dropping? There's no way."

Oh. "Oh."

"Yeah, 'oh'. Jesus, Will, she was killing people and no one ever caught on! Who knows how long she could have been going on like this?" There's a pause. "You said she was killed on purpose, that it was a gift. But we all agreed that the Ripper is no vigilante. It doesn't make any sense." She sounds frustrated, and Will wishes he could give her peace of mind, more information, but he can't. He won't.

It suddenly clicks. A gift. Showing a capacity for change. Why would the Ripper do that randomly? He wouldn't. He would only do it if he was trying to prove something.

Doing bad things to bad people feels good.

It was for him.

Hannibal, if he is the Ripper, had gifted Will a vile individual, showing that he's capable of heeding to his tastes. Will doesn't know how that is supposed to make him feel, but he knows

what he is feeling is a quiet thrum of pleasure. It's wrong, it's inappropriate on so many levels to feel this way, but he can't deny that he does.

"I don't know," Will lies. "I can't make sense of it either. Especially not at," he looks at his clock, "seven in the morning on a Saturday. Did you go in today?"

"Well, technically the reports came in last night before I left. I stayed late."

"You should have called me, I would have come in," Will says.

"I know, and that's exactly why I didn't call you. I didn't want to bother you."

"And calling me at seven in the morning on my day off isn't bothering me?" he quips lightly.

A sigh. "Yeah. Okay, point taken. Well, have a good day, loser." And with that she hangs up. Will smiles at his phone and falls back into bed.

Too many questions, and absolutely no answers, and he's having dinner with the man tonight.

It makes falling back to sleep impossible.

Chapter End Notes

Aaaand Will finds out. Kind of. I was going to make it this whole angsty thing, but I think I like this better. Dark Will is sort of my jam. Next update: dinner date.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

The dinner date, and the promise of something more.

Chapter Notes

I've got most of this story planned out now and written up to chapter 7, I just need to do editing and add some meat to them. I estimate this will be approximately 10 chapters.

Also, there is a bit of stolen dialogue in this chapter from the show. Forgive me lol.

Thank you all for reading this garbage, and for commenting and giving it kudos. It warms me from the inside out <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will stands by his bed looking down at it. On the surface of his unmade bed covers lay three different shirts and two pairs of pants, unassumingly staring back at him.

He wants to look nice. This will be their first official date and he wants Hannibal to know he's putting in some effort without completely changing who he is. He doesn't want to change. He thinks, maybe, that Hannibal doesn't want him to change either. Hannibal wants him; dog hair on his clothes, cheap aftershave, and all.

He thinks Hannibal wants him.

He doesn't know anymore. Every minute of every day since that kiss he's been second guessing himself. It still feels strange that a man like Hannibal who could have anyone he wanted would want Will.

He decides on a plain black button down to wear underneath his favorite cream sweater. He pairs them with his mostly unworn pair of black jeans, not ones he usually wears because of how tight they are.

Despite evidence to the contrary, Will knows how to clean up and he doesn't mind doing it. It's more a leftover habit than anything to wear plain, baggier clothing, leftover from a time when he was trying to hide his chest and lack of bulge and blend in with the masses.

As he's taking off his clothes, he ponders whether or not he should pack. There's upsides and downsides. He enjoys how it makes him fill out his pants a little better, and most days, he

does prefer packing, but if … *if* they sleep together tonight, he's not sure he's ready to reveal that little tidbit yet. His favorite silicone prosthetic tends to make him gather sweat below the belt, and he knows Hannibal has a sensitive nose.

Shame at the thought of what expression Hannibal would make were he to see a fake cock in his underwear heats his cheeks. Even still, he gives some consideration to the one that doubles as something suitable for penetration. Hannibal is hedonistic. There's a good chance he likes bottoming as well as topping because someone like him, who's such a control freak, surely enjoys that as well. Two sides of the same coin, a perfect descriptor, really, for Hannibal Lecter.

Will imagines that Hannibal's reaction to an actual, useful cock would be better than his reaction to a useless, limp dick. Still, the very thought of it causes his nerves to flare up like sparks traveling up his arms and to his chest, settling in his stomach like a rock.

Will sighs. He'll forgo packing tonight. If they do fall into bed together, and he doubts they will – Hannibal is such a gentleman, he'll likely wait for the third date, at least – he wants to be taken. It's been so long since he's been filled and it's an empty, aching longing. To be filled up and surrounded, to just feel and not have to think.

After putting his packers back in their drawer, he goes to his full-length mirror and looks over his naked body, touching his small cock, his testicular implants. He looks good. He's always loved what his bottom surgery was capable of giving him.

Testosterone had grown him out to a good size, and his metoidioplasty had given him a perfectly adequate inch and half soft. His clitoral hood gave the appearance of foreskin and hair had started to regrow a year after surgery, giving him the hairy balls he had always envisioned his body having, and giving an overall masculine appearance. He had elected to keep his front hole open, because he likes using it and never saw an issue with it.

Satisfied with his choice, he hops into the shower. He shampoos and conditions his hair with stuff that smells faintly of shea butter, good for his curls, and washes his body with his new sandalwood soap. The light fragrance fills his small bathroom pleasantly and he allows himself to relax into it. Already, he can feel the difference of using something that isn't a three-in-one. He tells himself this doesn't count as changing who he is if he genuinely enjoys his new purchases.

After rinsing off, he shuts the shower part off and turns the water to as cold as it can be, kneeling down in the tub to give his curls a good rinse. Cold water always makes them dry nice and bouncy. He thinks he'll leave his hair unstyled. He wants to look pleasantly wild and natural and he knows Hannibal likes his curls.

He dresses in his usual soft, light blue boxers and trims up his beard, applying his new delicately scented aftershave to his cheeks. The clothes he had laid out before go on one article at a time and he even takes a lint roller to his outfit once he's fully dressed.

Once the dogs are fed and taken out, settled afterwards on their beds with some peanut butter kongs, he feels as ready as he'll ever feel and makes his way out the door. The thought that

he might be dating none other than the Chesapeake Ripper doesn't even strike him as odd. Not one little bit.

Which, he admits to himself, might be a bit odd.

Hannibal is uncharacteristically at a loss as he stands in his massive closet in his underwear, picking and poking through his favorite suits but finding none of them suitable.

He's never at a loss for what to wear. Every occasion has a corresponding mask that he must adorn and each suit is tailored for this exact purpose. He has his suits that he wears at his office that make him appear larger and softer than he is, safe and mild mannered and only somewhat eccentric. He has suits he wears when he attends formal functions, bright and popping with color to detract from his shallow, surface level amusement and superiority. He has suits he wears when he hosts dinner parties, dark and giving the air of control, wealth, all the things the mindless sycophants expect from him and he hates to disappoint.

But Will is no mindless sycophant. He doesn't need to appease him, he doesn't need to shield himself from the fact that his emotions do not have the same range as a typical person's because Will makes him feel deeply. It's what he brings out in Hannibal.

He is everything Hannibal never expected to find. He doesn't want to dress to impress, he wants to dress to show he's comfortable. No masks, no shields, no armor.

He wants to just be himself for once in his life with someone.

With a shaking sigh that's dangerously skirting the edge of nervous, he picks out clothes he usually only wears when he's alone.

Will's nerves had dissipated on the drive over, for the most part. They've basically been dating for weeks, but now it's just official. He doesn't see why anything needs to change. Conversation is always easy between them, and their lunch together yesterday had been fine. Better than fine. This will be fine, too.

He does hesitate, though, however calm he feels. There is one thing he's nervous about and it isn't regarding compatibility or preemptively thinking of conversational topics – the usual things he's nervous about.

The Ripper doesn't kill impulsively. He can go long lengths of time between victims and it's always careful, controlled. The Ripper has gone years without making displays. Of course, just because the Ripper isn't ripping, doesn't mean he's not *killing.* Jack doesn't think this

particular theory is true, but Will knows he's right, knows it with a certainty deep down in his guts. There are always rude people and the Ripper is bored. What else is there to do?

All of this, all he's come to piece together so far, means there is a likely chance that whatever Hannibal is serving at his table tonight, it won't be exactly whatever he proclaims it to be. Sure, it might be short rib, but from what? Will realizes that it is quite common for Hannibal to say things like that: *we're having loin tonight,* or *wellington braised in red wine.* And whenever he's asked where from, his responses are quite … derogatory. *From a pig* instead of saying "pork" or *from a cow* instead of saying "beef."

The chance of that happening, however, is not enough to sway Will, not yet. Maybe not ever. If anything, he feels guilt only because he doesn't feel guilty.

He's finally found someone worth his time, worth his emotional labor. Someone who isn't scared of him and isn't wary of his mind or what it's capable of. He doesn't want to throw that away so quickly. No one's perfect, right? He knows it's a selfish way to think, but he deserves some goddamn selfishness every once in a while.

Will's morals have always been in the gray, jumping around from time to time depending on the circumstances. With Hobbs, they had been a darker gray, a life for the lives of eight, ten if you count his attempts on the lives of his wife and child, which Will certainly does. When he had been stabbed, they were nearer to black - the man had been desperate for money to feed his family, something Will is intimately understanding of. He had been trying to protect his earnings and Will had hesitated.

Will can't deny that there have been times he's considered it; considered taking a life. Even before he had emptied his clip into Hobbs.

He had wanted to kill Stamments. He had wanted to kill the woman who had kidnapped the Lost Boys and made them kill their families.

Hannibal's "therapy" had brought about acceptance of a truth he had never wanted to acknowledge before. That doing bad things to bad people felt *good.*

But if that's true, isn't the Ripper bad?

Maybe. But Hannibal isn't so bad. He thinks he can love all of him, instead of just the parts that are good. Probably already does.

He's been stalling long enough. Will gets out of his old Volvo and smoothes down his sweater before closing the door and locking it. He probably doesn't need to in this swanky neighborhood, but it's a formed habit.

He goes to knock on the door, but it opens before his fist can make contact. Hannibal stands on the other side, crisp white apron tied neatly around his waist and face drawn in taut. Will frowns, lowering his hand.

"I thought you were going to drive off," is all the older man says, words coming out in an unusually soft cadence.

Will smiles at him. This worry can't be faked, it simply can't be. Will comes in closer and gives Hannibal a solid kiss on his plush lips, immediately opening the other man's mouth with his tongue and sucking the organ inside his own mouth. Hannibal gives a surprised grunt at the sudden, intimate contact and Will swallows it where he can always keep it safe in his belly.

When the kiss slows down naturally, they part with wet, smacking lips. "Just got lost in thought," Will explains. "Ripper murder was found yesterday. You know how he gets me."

"I see," Hannibal breathes, looking him up and down slowly. Will wonders if the man even heard what he said. Hannibal's eyes appear to be glistening in the soft glow of the outdoor lamp, otherwise surrounded by the darkness of night. He licks his lips as he says, just barely over his breath, "You look - you are absolutely stunning."

"It's just a sweater and some pants," Will says self-consciously. "You look really nice, too." It's the first time he's really taken him in wholly since arriving. Hannibal is wearing a simple button down, open at the throat, tucked into some slacks. His sleeves are casually rolled up to his elbows and his hair is relaxed from its usual hold, falling softly across his forehead and around his ears. He looks comfortable, almost boyish.

He looks beautiful.

Hannibal's mouth is slightly parted as he keeps drinking Will in. And when Will steps inside and passes him, purposefully close, he does not miss how Hannibal leans in to smell him. If he's trying to be inconspicuous, he's failing miserably.

Will feels eyes burning holes into his ass as he walks deeper into the house. He's glad he wore these pants.

Hannibal doesn't say much as he closes the door behind them and comes to stand in front of the younger man as Will turns to face him. The doctor can't stop looking at him. His eyes flick over Will's face as his mouth opens and then closes. After a few moments, he seems to gather himself.

"Won't you follow me to the kitchen? I'm almost finished with everything, but I would enjoy your company," Hannibal says.

Will smiles. "I'd love that."

The smells coming from the kitchen are fantastic; cooking meats, herbs, spices, and sizzling olive oil. He knows better by now than to ask what's for dinner. Will is, as a general rule, not one for surprises, but Hannibal has never disappointed him.

"Beer or wine?" Hannibal asks. "Or perhaps something stronger?"

Will raises his brow at the other man. "You buy beer?"

"I *make* beer. Let me get you a glass so you may taste, and then you may tell me what *you* taste."

“Sounds good,” the younger man smiles. He doesn’t know why Hannibal would make beer of all things instead of wine, especially since he doesn't partake in the beverage, but he writes it off as a quirk of a man who loves flavors and creation.

Hannibal goes to his fridge with an empty tulip pint glass and comes back with a full one, foamy at the top, dark caramel in color. He can’t wait to see what it tastes like.

“Do you try your own supply?” Will asks, taking the offered glass and accepting the kiss to his cheek.

“I do. A chef must always taste their creations. Tell me what you think.” Hannibal goes back to the stainless steel island where he does most of his prep work, mincing what looks like parsley and sage and dusting the greens on top of a skillet filled to the brim with different kinds of textures.

Will takes a sip and nearly moans for how good it is. He licks the foam from his upper lip. Hannibal watches him with rapt attention, eyes hungry.

“Full bodied, my preference.” Will takes another sip and holds it in the back of his mouth before swallowing, closing his eyes as he sorts through the explosion of flavors on his tongue. “Brewed in a Cabernet Sauvignon wine barrel.”

Hannibal smiles at him, the crooked rows of his little teeth displayed in his pleasure. Will loves the look of it on him. “I love your palate.”

“You’ve helped with it.”

“Ah, but you’ve done most of the work. A teacher cannot impart sensitivity of the tongue. That is inherent. It just needed a little coaxing.”

“What else do I taste,” Will asks himself, taking another polite mouthful. “Oak? From the barrel, no doubt. Dark fruit - grape, obviously, black currant. Malt from the hops. Something floral, and,” he takes another sip. “Vanilla. And something … like spice, but barely there. Like bell peppers. It has a bright finish.”

Hannibal looks so proud. Will preens a little under the attention. “Very good, Will.”

“Yeah? Do I get a reward?”

“What would you like?”

“A kiss would be nice.”

Hannibal grins at him. “You may receive your just deserves after I have finished. I’m almost done.”

Hannibal plates his and Will’s meals while he asks Will to go sit at the table in the lush dining room, place settings already set and waiting. They will be sitting across from each other this evening, it seems. The centerpiece is a simple bouquet of white lilies, red carnations, and a

yellow flower he couldn't quite identify with a dark black center. The bouquet was surrounded by lit tea candles.

It was very romantic, classy, low enough that they would be able to see each other clearly.

He brings out the plates balanced delicately on his arm with a flourish, holding his wine glass in his free hand. Will's only thought, with grim humor, was that there better not be any kidney.

Hannibal sets the plates down, one beside the other on the table, and goes to kneel in front of where Will is sitting. Will watches as his large hands ghost up his thighs as he leans in. Will swallows thickly. He looks good like this, on his knees. It's an impolite thought, but no less true for it. He's looking up at Will as if Will has all the answers in the universe, burgundy eyes bright and tender.

"Your reward, as promised," the doctor whispers against his lips before touching them with his own. The kiss is different from ones they've shared previously and Will is helpless but to lean into it. It starts slow, but quickly builds in passion, deep and urgent. Hannibal mouths at his lips like he will never be able to taste them again, grips Will thighs like he's holding on for dear life.

It's discombobulating, and so incredibly good. Will moans into his mouth, not sure if the desperation he feels stroking the edges of his consciousness is his or Hannibal's. They feel like one and the same.

Will kisses back with the same intensity, running the fingers of both hands through Hannibal's soft, silvering blonde hair. Hannibal takes Will's lower lip between his teeth gently and sucks it into his hot mouth, pulling blood to the surface before letting it go with a soft pop.

When they break away, Will feels as hazy as Hannibal looks, eyes droopy and glazed, mouth swollen and slack jawed. Neither of them seem surprised by how good it felt.

They are parted just enough to be able to see each other, and no further. They breathe the same air.

"Will," Hannibal breathes into the space between them with a rough voice, stroking gently over Will's cheek with just the tip of a single finger. For the second time tonight, Hannibal is at a loss for words.

"I'm here," Will whispers back.

"I'm glad you are."

"Me too."

Hannibal licks his lips as he gathers himself, knees popping as he stands. It happens quickly, but Will is okay with that. He knows Hannibal's control is important to him. He, himself, still

feels the lingering effects of their kiss and he knows Hannibal does too for how his voice still sounds kiss-roughened as he speaks.

“Mixed grill paella - flounder, lobster, pork sausage, and kidney,” oh, fuck, “roasted roma tomatoes, seared red bell peppers, and peas. Served on a bed of saffron infused bomba rice,” Hannibal announces, moving Will’s plate in front of him from where he had thoughtlessly set them down before. He walks around the table to set his own down again after giving Will a lingering kiss to the forehead. When he sits, he’s smiling at Will. Will has noticed that Hannibal smiles a lot more these days, and wonders if he has anything to do with it.

He looks down at his plate, knowing that Hannibal likes to watch him take the first bite.

Kidney. Not what kind, or what from. Just kidney.

“What kind of kidney?” Will asks, scooping some of the paella onto his fork.

Hannibal tongues at his upper lip, a mischievous twinkle in his eyes that Will wonders how anyone could miss, how he had missed it. “From a sheep.”

Jesus.

Will takes the first bite, careful to avoid any bits of meat. It’s unfairly delicious, much like his beer, the flavors explode on his tongue and bring a feeling of comfort and satiation, even though he’s far from full. Comfort food. Heavy and filling and … Will realizes with a start that that was the intention. Providing, and satisfying.

If Hannibal is the Ripper, and that “if” was a lot smaller now than it was before, that would mean Will was eating something the man had procured for him, cooked for him, fed to him. Like how Will had enjoyed cooking the fish he caught for Hannibal, Hannibal enjoys cooking what he hunts for Will.

The possessive beast inside of him knows Hannibal cooks his kills for others, if they are indeed his kills, but he tamps down on it and tries to enjoy being here with the other man, one on one, no one else. Exclusive, Hannibal had said. He needs to trust that he meant it and stop acting like a jealous wretch.

Hannibal’s eyes are soft as he watches Will chew, and he takes his own first bite, humming at the taste.

Will thinks about it for maybe half a second before he spears some meat onto his fork. Brings it to his mouth. Takes it past his lips, and chews. Earthy fat slicks his taste buds, spices and herbs and the undeniable flavor of cooked flesh. It’s good. It’s really good. It’s so juicy that when he bites down it pops like a cherry.

He’s likely eaten human flesh before at Hannibal’s table. Doing it knowingly provides a thrill. That Hannibal doesn’t know Will knows is even better, and he allows himself a private smirk.

“Hannibal, this is perfect. Thank you.”

The older man nods demurely, looking down at his plate with a soft smile. “You’re most welcome, Will.”

There’s no question, now. It solidifies in Will’s mind like cooling glass, hardening and sharp. See-through.

He decides not to say anything about the victim from yesterday, how she had been missing her kidneys. It would be too obvious, and he still isn’t sure how Hannibal would react to him knowing. Will doesn’t think for one second that Hannibal won’t kill him if he feels he needs to. Will is just going to have to make sure he doesn’t feel the need to.

“How was work yesterday?” Hannibal asks pleasantly. As if he doesn’t know. The ass.

“It was fine. They didn’t believe me at first that it was the Ripper. Not until we opened her up.”

Hannibal makes a sound to show his displeasure. “They didn’t believe you? How so?”

“She’d had a recent surgery. The Ripper used her surgical incision to get inside her, masking any brutality aside from the gash on her neck. He wanted that visible.” Will doesn’t let his hesitation show as he considers his options, covering it up by taking another bite. He had wanted to avoid bringing up the kidneys, but they were discussing it now, and it would seem more suspicious if he hid information that he knew Hannibal knew. “He took her kidneys.”

Hannibal's expression is an excellent affectation of shocked surprise. “Oh. Had I known, I would have made something else.”

Will shakes his head consolingly. “It’s okay. It doesn’t bother me. These are sheep kidneys, at least,” he jokes. He does neglect to mention that he now knows the Ripper is eating his victims, though. That can happen at a later time.

“Yes, at least there’s that,” Hannibal agrees. “Would you like to further discuss it, or would that ruin your appetite?”

“We can talk about something else.” They take a few bites in comfortable silence, the only sound clinking utensils against fancy crockery. “I’m reading a new book.”

“Tell me about it.”

“ *Cien años de soledad.* It’s interesting, to say the least.” Will takes a sip of his beer, savoring it before he swallows. “Are you familiar?”

“I am, but it’s been many years since I’ve read it. 100 Years of Solitude was among some of the novels I was assigned while in boarding school. Are you reading it in the original Spanish?”

“I am. Or, I’m trying to,” Will huffs a laugh. “I went through four years of Spanish in high school, but after that, I never kept up with it. It’s coming back to me in fits and bursts. I have my Spanish dictionary on hand when I need it.”

“Nunca me dijiste que hablas español,” Hannibal says, the words rolling off his tongue beautifully. Of course he speaks Spanish.

“Tú tampoco,” Will responds easily.

Hannibal shrugs. “The Spanish I know is from Spain rather than South America. It is somewhat different than what is spoken there.”

“Is it very different?” Will asks, interested.

“Much like British English and American English. Understandable, but there are distinct differences and sometimes context clues must be used to better interpret meaning. The accent is also slightly different. In Spain, however, the language is more commonly referred to as *Castellano*, which refers to the Castile province where the language is said to have originated.”

Will loves listening to him talk, loves learning everything Hannibal is only too happy to share. “I didn’t know that. But it’s nice to think that if I ever traveled, I’d know enough of the language to get by.”

“You would do more than get by, I think. You have an adept mind, Will. You pick things up quickly.”

Will flushes. “Flatterer.”

“I’m only speaking from what I observe. I’m not one to, how do you say it, ‘blow smoke up one’s ass.’”

Will laughs outright at the curse, just another idiom that Hannibal has heard Will use and is now using it. It makes Will feel incredibly warm. Hannibal watches him laugh and gives a smile, wide and toothy. He seems to take great joy in making Will laugh.

Throughout the rest of dinner as they talk and eat and drink, Will tries to fit together both of the sides of the other man in his mind. The Hannibal he knows with the Hannibal he has figured out.

Emotions can be faked - this he knows to be true. He’s faked enough pretty well, himself, in his lifetime out of necessity. But the thing about faked emotions is that there is always a certain surface level of something unidentifiable, something that never fails to make the hairs on the back of Will’s neck stand on end. He’s sensed it from Hannibal more than once, mostly in the beginning, and sometimes even now, but that gives him a basis for comparison. He doesn’t feel that crawling sensation right now, when they kiss, when they talk, when Hannibal looks at him like he hung the very stars.

Whatever is building up between them right now is genuine. He’s certain of it. Will isn’t sure if Hannibal doesn’t have ulterior motives, but he’s willing to bet they aren’t so different from his own if he does. To create a safety net, so to speak, something to catch him when he falls into the truth.

His profile on the Ripper still holds true. He's lonely. An artist with no one to truly share his work with, not anyone who will understand it like Will can. Hannibal lives in this big house full of amazing works of art and trinkets and furnishings, filled to the brim with beautiful things, yet there is still a feeling of emptiness. Hannibal sits at this very table every night and eats by himself, and maybe he's happy to, maybe he once was, but Will thinks that has changed and he thinks he is the one who changed him.

It feels egotistical to even think it, but Will is rarely ever wrong about these things.

"I hope you saved room for desert," Hannibal says, bringing him out of his thoughts.

Will nods. "Of course."

Hannibal nods too and makes to stand up. "Wait here, I'll only be a moment." He kisses Will's forehead like he did before dinner, melting him to goo in his chair, and then goes back into the kitchen.

He comes out barely a minute later with two small steaming plates. "Apple galette, drizzled with homemade vanilla bean yogurt sauce and Ceylon cinnamon." He sets Will's plate down and then his own, just like with dinner. A man of habit and routine.

It's crisp on the outside and melted-gooey on the inside, the perfect blend of fresh fruit and sugar without being overly sweet. Will can see this becoming his favorite dessert, maybe with a side of vanilla ice cream, and tells Hannibal so around his mouthful.

"It is quite simple to make. I'd be happy to show you how."

"Are you offering cooking lessons?"

"I am offering you quality time, in the form of cooking lessons," Hannibal gently corrects. He's flirting. Will heats up inside with happiness.

"I definitely enjoy my quality time with you," he flirts back, grinning softly and shaping his eyes in a way he knows is appealing. Big baby blues staring up beneath a fan of thick lashes.

It has the desired effect. Hannibal's fork wobbles en route to his mouth before finally reaching its destination, eyes never leaving Will's face as his fork pushes into his mouth. Will smirks to himself.

After desert, Will doesn't ask before he starts helping Hannibal collect their plates and empty glasses. He follows the older man into his kitchen and rolls up his shirtsleeves and sweater so he can help clean up. Hannibal doesn't give any token protests, nor does he look disapproving. It feels domestic and easy as breathing as Hannibal soaps up the dishes and hands them to Will to rinse and put on the drying rack.

Heated glances keep them company as they dry the dishes with tea rags one by one. Will is starting to think he's going to have breakfast here tomorrow morning with how Hannibal's eyes rove all over him, giving particular attention to his hind end and arms.

They're furtive glances, just this side of not being gentlemanly - he probably thinks he's being sneaky. Will far from minds it.

The dishes are done. They stare at each other over the sink, Will feeling helpless to look away and Hannibal looking no better.

"Thank you for helping with the dishes."

"Thank you for cooking us an amazing meal," Will replies.

Hannibal looks down and dusts imaginary lint off of his slacks. "Can I interest you in a nightcap?"

Will nods. Smiles. "Maybe some more of that beer? Anything stronger and I won't be able to drive home."

Hannibal nods, but doesn't move to the fridge. His eyes flick from Will's eyes down to his nose and then back again as he briefly chews at his lower lip. It's endearing, but his mask is back in place not a second later. "I'm going to ask you a question, Will."

Will blinks. "Oh?"

"If you say no, that's perfectly alright."

"Mmhm?" Will draws out the hum, forcing himself not to gulp. Oh god.

Hannibal takes a step closer, reaching out to touch Will, but not touching him, his hand just in the air by Will's arm. Will wants to lean in, to let him know it's okay, but watching the man's nervousness – is it nervousness? – is fascinating.

"Would you like to stay the night?" the older man asks. "I can prepare the guest room for you, if you'd prefer. Or not. Or, of course, we can simply have our nightcap and then say goodnight." He speaks softly, cadence low and slightly slowed, as if he's forcing himself to not rush through it. Will can feel that it's genuine.

Will takes a step closer as well, closing the distance between them. "I was worried I'd have to wait weeks of being wined and dined before you asked."

Hannibal dips his head down demurely. "That was my original plan, but … I …" he trails off. Will is struck by this side of Hannibal he's seeing. Nervous. Unsure. As curious as he is about this new aspect of him, he doesn't want to be cruel. It's not in his nature, not for those he genuinely cares about.

Hannibal always had a plan, a man who stuck to routine and order, and Will was throwing a wrench in all of it just by being who he was. It was a heady feeling, one that went straight to Will's head. Seeing this, knowing it's not a farce, an affected façade, makes him more sure of this than anything else ever could have.

"I want you, Hannibal. I want this with you." Will intones quietly into the scant space between them. "There's no question in my mind." There should be. There *should* be, but if it

exists, it doesn't make itself known.

Hannibal swallows, throat clicking. "Will."

"Honestly, I was ready to put out before we started dating," he says to lighten the mood. It works. Hannibal huffs a small breath of amusement, looking at Will fondly. "Hannibal, if we do this …"

Hannibal tilts his head. "What?"

Will looks hard into his eyes, serious. "I don't share."

Hannibal looks positively delighted. "I thought we already decided to be exclusive?"

Will exhales, and it contains the nervous, possessive energy roaring through him. "I don't want short term. If that's what this is going to be, you need to tell me now."

"I don't want short term, either," he whispers earnestly. "I want you always. I always have."

Hannibal's words come as a surprise, and Will feels the breath leave him. In a fit of bravery, Will closes the space between them and tentatively presses their chests together, rubbing his nose sweetly against Hannibal's when he's quickly welcomed. Hannibal melts against him, nuzzling him back. His hands are gripping Will almost too tightly.

This hadn't been the plan, but there had been no plan.

Will wants this. Even knowing what Hannibal is, what Hannibal *does*, he wants this.

He waits for last minute feelings of disgust or fear to come, but they don't. They don't exist inside of him. He has never been disgusted by the Ripper. He has never feared Hannibal. Hannibal who looks at him like he would kill anyone for him, like he would die for him.

Will is … okay with this. They are going to have to have a discussion, but it can wait.

The younger man takes the older man's hands, his beautiful fucking hands, and tugs him towards the stairs with a coy smile.

Will can't believe they're really about to do this. His body from his scalp down to his toes is positively *thrumming*.

Hannibal's breath shakes as he wordlessly follows.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sure you can guess what's coming in the next chapter, or should I say *who's* coming. Hehehehe.

Just wait until our jealous boy finds out who that beer was brewed for ;)

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

The sexual tension finally bursts. Will has a bit of a conniption.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this is a little late, depression sucks. This chapter is a long one. I wanted to split it up, but there was no where to really do that seamlessly.

Thank you for reading, and commenting, and giving me kudos. Those give me more serotonin than my Zoloft does.

Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When they reach the bottom landing of the ornate staircase, Will pauses. Hannibal stops. The older man looks quietly unsure – unsure of if Will has changed his mind, unsure of if this is really happening – Will can't know for sure, but it's a sentiment he understands. It's a strange look on a man who is usually so self-assured and confident. Will's heart pangs with the need to reassure someone he never thought would need it.

"I just realized I don't know where your bedroom is," Will says with a shy smile.

The lightly stated assurance has its intended effect. Hannibal's eyes flutter to half mast with amusement, a small smile perking the corner of his lips. Will wants to put his hand to Hannibal's chest and feel his heartbeat, wants to know if the serial killer's heart is beating even half as fast as Will's is in this moment.

He doesn't see why he can't. He lifts his hand and places it over the other man's chest, right above where his heart is not so much beating as it is banging in his chest behind the bone cage of his ribs. Will lets a soft breath whoosh out of him at the knowledge that he has done this to Hannibal. *He* has done this to the Chesapeake Ripper.

The effect on Will is profound.

"Last door on the right," Hannibal says, reduced to incomplete sentences, taking Will's hand from his chest and kissing it. He doesn't let it go.

Will leads him up the wooden staircase on booted feet. With their hands linked and Hannibal's eyes burning holes in his back, he doesn't spare any time to take in the sparsely decorated stairwell, but he catches glimpses of some paintings and shelved artifacts. Will gets that sense again - that while Hannibal's house is filled with things, it's … devoid.

His bedroom is a different story. A suit of Samurai armor stands in the large entryway, looking out over the rest of the room protectively. An ornate rug lines the carpeted floors by the foot of the bed where a plush looking ottoman rests, adorned with a striped decorative pillow. The mattress of said bed is at least a foot thick, if not thicker, plush and inviting, layered with crisp white sheets and soft looking duvet that matches the blue paint on the ceiling.

It's beautiful and exudes warmth the rest of Hannibal's massive house doesn't. It feels like a den, a nest, a place where a sleepy predator can lay his weary head, surrounded by creature comforts, utterly safe.

"Shall I light a fire?" Hannibal asks, still holding Will's hand, thumb roaming gently over his knuckles. If Will didn't know any better, he'd think Hannibal was stalling. Will isn't sure he doesn't know better.

"Sure," Will replies, letting his hand go one inch at a time. Hannibal seems just as reluctant to leave the intimate connection, but he goes to the fireplace and turns the gas on once their hands have lost contact, taking a lighter to the logs that are stacked there and watching as the flame starts to catch. Hannibal turns to look at him, maybe to ask if it was satisfactory, Will doesn't know. He suspects Hannibal doesn't know, either. His mouth opens like he's going to say something, but then it closes. Will watches as he swallows thickly.

The light from the fire catches all of the older man's angles beautifully, the shadows on his face providing a stark contrast to what is visible - his eyes, dark and glinting red, his sharp nose and faint eyebrows and the jut of one proud cheekbone.

He's just … he's so beautiful, it hurts, crouched by the fire and looking at Will like he doesn't know what to do next. Will shudders out a breath and reaches his hand out to him once more, beckoning him back to the private space they shared before.

Hannibal comes at once, knees popping as he stands. He gets right back into Will's personal space like he belongs there.

Hannibal's eyes are flickering all over Will's face, never staying in one place too long. His hands hang uselessly by his sides, reaching up as if to touch the younger man, but hesitating before contact is made. Will watches as the other man wets his lips.

It hits Will with a start: Hannibal is *nervous*.

Will feels the urge, again, to reassure him and doesn't fight it. He steps in closer and rests his head on Hannibal's shoulder, encircling his waist with strong arms, sighing sweetly when Hannibal immediately mirrors him. It feels so good to hold and be held by him. Will nuzzles his face into Hannibal's warm neck, kissing the soft skin there lightly, a barely there brush of his lips. Hannibal gasps.

Thunder rumbles from the skies, echoing inside the chamber of Hannibal's bedroom as if the gods know something earth-shattering is about to take place. Will is trembling out of his skin.

"You're shaking," Hannibal says with a lowered voice.

Will inhales the light scent of his cologne, clean and masculine. "It's been awhile."

"For me, too."

"Years," Will clarifies. As if it matters.

"For me, too," Hannibal repeats. With the low register he's speaking at, Will feels more than hears Hannibal as he says, "I hope you are not adverse to communication during."

Will smiles against his neck, kissing it again. "Not at all. How well do you take direction, Dr. Lecter?" He intentionally draws out the vowels, dropping his voice an octave.

Hannibal pulls back. His eyes are dark, hungry. "You will find me an excellent student, Professor Graham," he utters softly, looking back and forth between Will's eyes with his head slightly ducked, looking at Will from underneath the fringe of his hair.

Will forgets to breathe. They will be revisiting that later. "Then I think we'll work well together."

"We always have."

"Yes," Will says simply and begins to unbutton Hannibal's shirt with unsteady hands. "We have."

It hits him kind of suddenly: they had agreed to be exclusive. Exclusion infers commitment. He's about to touch someone he's committed to, and someone who is committed to him is about to touch him. Even though this is their first time together, and they are so new to each other in this way, it feels right to touch him like this. It feels like he was always meant to. Will feels sure like he never has about anything before in his life.

He is committed to this man, even knowing what he is, but he's never felt safer in the arms of someone else than he does in Hannibal's. He can feel it in the way the other man is looking at him, reaching his hands up so slowly to carefully place them on Will's forearms as he works Hannibal's shirt open, their grasp sure, yet as unsteady as Will's. Can feel it in the way Hannibal starts to grip him tighter like he's afraid Will is going to vanish into thin air if he doesn't.

Will unfolds the garment from Hannibal's torso and lays it flat over the ottoman at the foot of the bed without taking his eyes off him. A thick pelt of dark, graying hair accents his chest, surrounding his small, dusky nipples. His muscles aren't showy and obvious, but the strength in them is, his arms slender, his wrists almost delicate, sloping out to his large, balletic hands. The softness around his middle is frankly adorable and Will can't wait to pay it the attention it deserves.

Hannibal watches Will taking him in. He is as unashamed in his own skin as Will is looking at him. Will's mouth goes dry at thought that he can *touch*.

Without taking his eyes off Hannibal's exposed skin, Will shucks off his own sweater, throwing it onto the same surface with less care than he had paid Hannibal's clothing. He goes to unbutton his shirt, but Hannibal makes a sound in his throat that stops him.

"Let me."

Will nods, letting his arms fall to his sides. Hannibal painstakingly unbuttons him, greedily taking in every inch of revealed flesh as Will did him. The urge to hide away from that intense gaze is strong, but his need to be seen is stronger. So he doesn't hide, doesn't shield. He straightens his back from his perpetual slouch and lets the older man look his fill.

And Hannibal does, greedily taking in Will's smooth chest, the faint scars under his pectorals, the strong muscles that cause dips and plains across his torso, down to the vee of his hips where hair starts to dust his skin with dark curls in a thin trail.

"Will …" Hannibal breathes.

"Touch me."

In front of the fire, both men half naked, Hannibal drops to his knees for the second time that night for Will. The younger man wonders how many people have seen Hannibal from this perspective. He guesses not many, if any. He sees it for what it is: a precious gift, one he plans to protect with every fiber of his being.

Hannibal's large hands grasp around Will's flanks before sliding down to cup his still clothed ass, giving each cheek a gentle squeeze with a moan that imprints itself upon Will's skin. He kisses his stomach with slow drags of his damp lips, kissing across the width of him and then flicking his tongue out to taste the hair below his navel. Will sinks his hands into Hannibal's hair, not to direct, but simply to hold, and sighs out his pleasure.

It's been so long since he's been touched like this, and by someone who was more than just curious about him. Hannibal's lips leave a trail of damp fire across the skin of his belly, then up until he reaches his nipples. Will is, thankfully, short enough that the reach isn't awkward and Hannibal doesn't have to crane his head too much to get at what he wants.

The first lick to his nipple is cautious, just a soft flick that takes the wind out of him.

"S-sensitive. No biting or hard sucking," Will cautions.

Hannibal nods his head against him and closes his mouth around the nipple he had fixated on, suckling gently and swirling his hot tongue around the pebbled bud. Will gasps at the feeling, clutching his hair a little tighter. "Oh, that's good. That's perfect."

Hannibal's body gives the slightest of trembles at the praise. Will takes note of it.

The doctor continues to suck and lick at Will's nipple as the young man moans his approval, looking down in suspended disbelief at how that plush, red mouth looks around him.

Hannibal is using the thumb of his right hand to flick and rub at the other while he does so and the gentle treatment makes Will's knees feel weak.

Will’s nerves had been dead in this area for years after his top surgery, and had come back with a vengeance very suddenly. They were so sensitive that he had to donate some of his favorite shirts because they were too rough against them, but Hannibal is treating him with care, using his mouth and fingers to make Will feel so, so good. Already, he’s proving he can take direction as well as he said he could.

Two little words are sitting on the back of Will's tongue: *good boy.* He doesn't know where they come from, but he knows without a doubt in his mind that he's picking up some latent yearnings from Hannibal. He holds off on saying them.

Hannibal's mouth begins to wander lower, kissing and sucking at his chest, his stomach, dipping the point of his tongue into his belly button and applying suction.

His mouth leaves Will’s skin with a soft smack. “Are you averse to biting in general?” Hannibal asks against his skin. “I can’t deny my teeth aren’t itching.”

Of course the Chesapeake Ripper would like biting. Of course.

Will wonders if the man on his knees has an oral fixation. If he does, and it’s very likely he does, Will plans to indulge it.

“I can’t say I know,” Will admits honestly. “Let’s find out together. Start off gentle.”

Hannibal, looking up at him with nothing short of devotion, nods and sets his mouth back to Will’s skin. He lips at him for a moment, tongues at the sensitive skin stretched over his iliac crest, before setting the edges of his teeth to him and giving a tender nip.

Will’s knees buckle. “Oh.”

“Yes?”

“*Yes*.” A beat. “A little harder.”

“Yes, sir,” Hannibal replies coquettishly, and *fuck* they are definitely going to be revisiting that later.

Hannibal once again kisses his skin before setting his teeth in, sharp and insistent this time. Will feels the sting of his bite like a lightning bolt to his crotch, Hannibal biting hard enough to leave indents. Hannibal gently shakes his face into Will’s hip while his teeth are full of Will’s flesh and Will pants.

“Fuck. Okay, yeah, biting is good.” A cannibal is biting him. And he likes it.

He feels Hannibal chuckle against him. “You are welcome to return them. I would enjoy nothing more.”

Fuck.

“And,” Will takes a breath to steady himself, “how do you like to be bitten?”

The look Hannibal gives him is full of heat and promise. “You may take a bite out of me if that is your wish.”

“You don’t mean that,” Will says, looking down at him with hazy eyes. Hannibal is staring at him unblinkingly, unwaveringly. “Fuck. You mean it.”

Hannibal kisses over the teeth welts he left on Will’s hip while Will continues to stroke through his silvery blonde hair. The older man’s fingers dip lower to play with his belt buckle. Will, despite the pleasure he feels, feels himself tense up.

“May I?” Hannibal asks, staring up at him.

Will takes a fortifying breath. Nods.

Hannibal doesn’t ask him what he’s about to see. He doesn’t make any comment whatsoever as he undoes Will’s belt and jeans. The only sound Hannibal makes is his eager breathing - loud enough to be heard, but too soft to be considered a pant. Will feels the gusts of his hot breath against his prickling skin.

When his jeans are undone, his boxers peeking through the open flaps, Hannibal has to tug them down for how tight fitting they are. They share a shy chuckle as Will steps out of the denim, only in his blue boxer shorts now. Hannibal is about to let his jeans fall to the floor, but at the last second, sets them instead with his sweater on the ottoman and then turns back to him. His fingers come up to play with the elastic waistband of his boxers. He’s looking up at Will questioningly.

Will smiles at him, nervous and excited, and pulls his boxers down himself so he can step out of them.

The feeling of bearing himself this way to Hannibal is … intense. He feels anxiety shoot up and through his stomach to his rapidly beating heart, squeezing his lungs. His breath, when it comes, is shallow as he waits.

Hannibal’s eyes flutter as he scents the air. He drops his gaze.

And *moans.*

He wastes no time in leaning his head in and nosing at Will’s pubic hair, breathing him in deeply before releasing his breath in shuttering waves. “Please tell me I can,” Hannibal utters, face buried in his coarse curls.

“You can,” Will tells him, not knowing what exactly he’s asking for, but not caring as long as it means Hannibal keeps touching him.

“Is there anything,” an audible swallow, “I should know?”

He hates this conversation, but it’s a necessary one, and it’s considerate that Hannibal thought to ask.

Will takes Hannibal's hand in his, intent on having him touch as he speaks. A proper learning experience. "I refer to this," he touches Hannibal's fingers to his little cock as Hannibal watches rapturously, "as my cock. I like having my foreskin played with. My balls aren't sensitive like yours," he says; their hands follow his verbal direction as he urges Hannibal to cup them, "but it still feels good when they're touched."

Hannibal leans in infinitesimally towards Will's crotch as he continues, as if he can't help himself. "You can touch my front hole," Will says, guiding Hannibal's hand towards his wet opening, "but don't refer to it in anatomical terms. I call it my front hole, or the front. I like attention there, but only sometimes. I would prefer you to ask every time unless I give you blanket permission." Will takes a breath. Hannibal looks like he's struggling to. "I prefer anal sex over using the front. My ass is really sensitive. I can come, alone, from having it fucked."

Hannibal is swallowing compulsively throughout Will's lengthy proclamation, nodding along and listening intently. When Will stops speaking, Hannibal leans his head on Will's stomach, nuzzling into his soft skin with his nose.

"You're perfect," Hannibal whispers. He leans in again, licks at his happy trail. "Will, I'd like to go down on you now. Please."

Ah, so that's what he's been wanting. "Yes," Will whispers.

Hannibal grips his hips and scoots him back until the back of Will's knees are hitting the ottoman. Will sinks down onto it, tilting his hips up and spreading his legs invitingly and making Hannibal groan at the view. Hannibal knee-crawls closer until he's between Will's spread thighs and places his hands on them, sliding them up to cup Will's trim hips.

He once again noses along his happy trail, licking here and there as he gathers his scent.

"You smell divine."

Will smiles down at him. "I've been using better soap."

Hannibal shakes his head. "I meant your musk. Here." And Hannibal's tongue flicks out to lap at the furred skin just above Will's cock. "I want to bottle you up and wear you everywhere."

Will sighs, relaxing into Hannibal's hold. He's past the worst part. Now all that remains is togetherness and mutual pleasure. "Hmm. I'd like that, if you did. You'd be marked as mine," he says boldly.

Hannibal's eyes are dark as sin as he looks up at Will. He looks incredibly pleased. "That's the idea," he agrees throatily, and not a moment later, he's taking Will into the velvet heat of his mouth.

Will could faint for how fucking good it feels. Hannibal immediately applies suction, reaching up to fondle his balls as he bobs his head up and down on Will. Then his tongue, that fucking tongue, starts rolling against the underside of his cock, flicking against the tip where his foreskin has receded and slipping underneath in sensuous licks.

Will doesn't know what to do with his hands amidst the onslaught of pleasure, so Hannibal reaches up to place them back into his own hair, encouraging Will to squeeze and pull as he likes.

"Ungh *fuck* Hannibal. Your pretty fucking mouth – "

Hannibal's eyes are glazed over as he suckles and licks at Will, looking up at him in a stupor as he pops off, then sucks him back down, pulls his lips off with a lewd pop, then sucks him back down again, over and over, groaning as he does as if he were the one getting sucked off.

A particularly hard suck has Will keening loudly, cursing under whatever breath he has left, screwing his eyes shut to keep from losing himself to it. He thrusts his hips up experimentally. Hannibal's eyes flutter at the action, so Will grips his hair with both hands, and *thrusts*.

"Mfph," Hannibal gasps and reaches down not a second later. Will can't see what he's doing, but the flexing of his veiny forearm and his biceps and the location of where his hand went makes it obvious what he's doing to himself.

For long stretches of time, Hannibal enjoys himself on Will's cock and Will pants and moans through his ministrations, undulating his eager hips with his back pressed to the bed behind him, hands holding Hannibal's head in place.

It's good. It's unbelievably good, but he wants more. Will pulls Hannibal's head away. He releases Will with a pitiful groan of loss.

"Will." He's still palming himself roughly through his slacks and the sight is unbearably hot.

Will scoots back until he is on the bed properly, positioning himself to kneel on the soft as a cloud mattress and holding his arms out to Hannibal who doesn't take long at all to fall into them. Will reaches down and begins undoing the buckle of Hannibal's belt, the clasps of his slacks, and pushes those along with his little black briefs down his thighs. Hannibal maneuvers himself so that he can take them off completely, along with his socks.

Will licks his lips at what he sees.

Hannibal's dick is framed by coarse, dark blonde curls that look untamed and wild and so incredibly sexy. He loves that Hannibal doesn't groom, or "manscape" as they're calling it these days. He loves him just like this.

His cock is gorgeous. Long and thick enough to feel good without being too much, a fat mushroom head and curved slightly upwards and to the left, leaking like a faucet. Will watches a strand of precum drip down in a willowy strand towards the bedsheets, followed by another, and *another*.

His balls are tight against his pelvis, swollen and dusted with the same hair that frames his beautiful cock like a portrait. He has foreskin which Will isn't surprised by. What he is surprised by is how *wet* his dick is. He gets wetter than *Will*.

“Fuck, Hannibal. C’mere,” Will beckons. Hannibal comes to him, kneeling right in front of him again, so close that the tip of his soaked cock brushes against Will’s and they both gasp.

Will grips Hannibal by his soft hips and pulls him ever closer. “You’re beautiful,” Will says as he grinds their hips together, creating delicious friction, licking into his mouth. He tastes like the musk of Will’s sex and something uniquely Hannibal. He moans into Will’s mouth and tilts his head for a better angle, surrendering himself and letting Will delve freely inside. It’s wet and sloppy and completely perfect.

They both gasp into each other’s mouths as their cocks grind together in a slow dance of flesh, a wet slide that feels so fucking good, Will could probably come from this alone. He’d like to, some time, but he aches to have Hannibal inside of him.

Will maneuvers them so that Hannibal is laying on his back and climbs on top of him, straddling his hips. Hannibal immediately places his hands on Will’s body, stroking up his smooth chest and down his arms. For a moment they are quiet as they take each other in, take in the feeling of their bodies touching this way for the first time. Each man is nearly trembling in anticipation of what they are about to do.

Will leans down and offers his mouth for exploration at Hannibal’s leisure. The older man takes it and delves his tongue inside without care for skill. Will doesn’t care either. This is honest, born out of a need for closeness and pure desire rather than a need to show off or act a certain way.

They kiss for long minutes, Will doing some exploring of his own as he teases the tip of his tongue along the sharp edges of Hannibal’s cutely crooked teeth, tracing and learning their unique shape, and tasting the texture of the rugae at the roof of his mouth. Hannibal tastes like fresh honeydew and the earthy salt of healthy flesh. The possessive beast inside of Will roars his approval at still tasting a hint of his own musk on Hannibal's tongue.

Will doesn’t stop their kisses as he starts grinding his hips down, sliding the crevice of his leaking sex along the shaft of Hannibal’s cock. Hannibal’s hips flex up and he whimpers into Will’s mouth.

Will is wetter than he’s been in a while. He didn’t think he could get this wet anymore and he wonders how much is his, and how much is Hannibal’s. It makes the slide of their skin smooth and slippery. His cock is so hard, he’s throbbing and Hannibal is no better off, the feeling of it twitching against him indescribable.

The feel of them like this together is more than Will can properly put into words, even inside the privacy of his own mind. Scattered pieces that have drifted lonely and wanting inside Will’s body for years come together and snap into place, reverberating off the echoing cavern of his skin.

He was right to want this. Nothing could ever make him give this up now that he’s had it. Nothing.

Hannibal’s fingers dig into the meat of Will’s hips while the younger man rolls his hips down in filthy circles onto the rock hard girth of Hannibal’s cock, urging him on while he flexes his

hips up to meet him. Will leans down and cages Hannibal in between his arms. The new angle allows his cock to be stroked fully by Hannibal's from root to tip. He has half a mind to bite down against the noises threatening to well up, but Hannibal is being quite vocal, and he wants to give that back to the other man. If Hannibal isn't hiding, then neither is Will.

Hannibal shudders as Will keens against his mouth. His hands mirror Will's as he winds his arms around the younger man's neck, sinking his fingers into Will's curls as they rock and pant together.

This close, Will's mouth in reach of Hannibal's soft neck, he understands what Hannibal meant by itching teeth. He longs to know what it feels like to sink into his supple flesh. Will breaks off their kiss and sets his teeth to Hannibal's skin. Hannibal freezes, holding his breath. Will is about to ask if this is okay when Hannibal pushes his neck against Will's mouth with a shuddering sigh.

"Please," he whispers.

Will exhales and bites.

He starts off gently at first, nipping, nibbling, sucking, but at Hannibal's needy noises, his insistent wiggling, he quickly transitions to a harsher bite at the juncture of his shoulder and neck, sinking his teeth in easily. Hannibal's flesh is salty and clean tasting, damp with sweat and Will groans against him at the taste, the feeling of being allowed this. There's a certain power here at being afforded the trust to not go too far, to be able to give this to Hannibal with the safety of knowing Will will only go just far enough. He can understand, now, why Hannibal had enjoyed doing this to him so much.

With only a moment's hesitation, Will bites harder. Until he can feel skin popping and tastes the blooming sharp flavor of metallic blood coating his tongue.

Hannibal writhes underneath him, his hips flexing up sporadically as he pants and whimpers his pleasure next to Will's ear. Will is like a dog with a bone, not letting go and flicking his tongue out for a richer taste. He groans around his mouthful just as he feels something hot and wet splash against his stomach, hears Hannibal roar as he shakes underneath him.

Reluctantly, Will lets his teeth relax and swipes his tongue out to wipe away the excess blood and saliva that had pooled there during his bite. Looking down between them, he sees a complete mess of cum roped up Hannibal's belly, smeared on them both.

Hannibal had come all over himself from nothing but Will's teeth in his neck.

Shaken, Will's eyes travel lazily from where Hannibal's cock is softening, up his soaked, heaving belly and fuzzy chest, to the crook of his neck where a deep, red bite wound sluggishly pulses with fresh blood. He doesn't feel ashamed. He feels proud. It's his mark, his claim, his promise.

He hopes it scars.

His eyes continue their journey up Hannibal's elegant neck to his plush mouth. It's pressed into a thin line. Will frowns and looks up to where Hannibal's eyes are screwed shut.

"I am so sorry, Will. I was overcome. This is not a typical occurrence, I assure you. I can still perform if you give me a mome-"

"Hannibal. Hey, it's okay," Will says against his cheek, kissing it softly. "That was … incredibly hot, actually. That I could do that to you." Will gives him a heated gaze and starts descending down Hannibal's body.

Hannibal looks vaguely alarmed when Will starts to move, but when Will stops once he's comfortably nestled between Hannibal's spread legs, he relaxes.

"Not going anywhere. It'll take more than that to scare me off," Will assures him with a private smirk, thinking about the very human kidney he had just eaten for dinner. He nuzzles into the softness of Hannibal's belly and flicks his tongue out for a taste, gathering up some of the copious amount of white, sticky fluid spilled there onto his tongue.

Hannibal watches with widened eyes and a slack mouth as Will cleans him up lick by slow, tender lick. Will takes his time, in no rush, enjoying the salty bitter taste of the other man as he takes it into his mouth, into his body. There is no hesitation when he moves his mouth to Hannibal's soft cock, wet with cum and laying small and prone against his hip. He cleans him here with the same tenderness he did his stomach.

A hand cards through his hair, a gesture so sweet it makes Will sigh. He leans up and looks again at the bite he left on Hannibal's shoulder.

"Do we need to treat that?" Will asks, tracing the outer edges of it with the tip of his finger. He presses on it, just to see a few more dots of dark blood well up.

Hannibal sighs dreamily and urges Will back up to him. Will goes. "It needs to be cleaned at the very least, but I would prefer to wait."

"For?"

Hannibal kisses him. Will melts into it and opens his mouth so Hannibal can taste the combination of their flavors. Hannibal seems to like that very much if his groan is any indication.

"For after," Hannibal replies against his lips hotly. "We're not leaving this bed yet."

Will smiles and it feels like it's splitting his face in half. He leans down to kiss Hannibal's cheek again, then his nose, and finally the line of his lips, trying to get them to soften. "And what plans are you concocting for us in this bed, I wonder?"

Hannibal licks his lips, meeting his eyes. "I want you to sit on my face."

Will falters, his mind cutting off and then coming back online with a sharp reboot at the vulgar words coming from such prim and proper lips.

Hannibal, hesitantly, like Will is going to rebuff him, moves a hand to where Will is still hard and wet and hot as a furnace. He moans as his fingers stroke lightly up and down the underside of Will's little cock, gathering fluid and smearing it over him before taking Will between his fingers and stroking.

"Please," Hannibal whispers. "Let me give this to you."

Will shifts his hips to get Hannibal to stroke him a little harder. "Pretty sure it won't be just for me."

"It won't be," Hannibal agrees, firming his touch. His face is still flushed from his orgasm and maybe something else. Will sighs a little breath of relief as Hannibal leans up to kiss him, a soft kiss that quickly deepens as the older man's embarrassment at coming too quickly fades away.

Will grinds down onto Hannibal's hand, pistoning his hips to fuck into the tight channel of his long fingers. "Always - fuck. Always loved your hands."

"Are my hands really all you want?" Hannibal purrs.

"Ngh. Want your mouth," Will says between their lips. "Wanna ride it."

"Then you better get up here."

Just the image of sitting on Hannibal's face has him quivering. Will mutters a curse under his breath and maneuvers himself as gracefully as he can until his crotch is right above the other man's waiting mouth. The heat from his breath strokes along Will's throbbing skin and makes the muscles of his pelvic floor clench tightly.

Will hesitates.

Hannibal groans under his breath, leaning up to run his nose along Will's cock, balls, and soaked front hole. "A little closer," Hannibal whispers. His breath tickles against Will's throbbing sex. His large hands come up to Will's hips, massaging them and urging him down.

Will spreads his legs to bring himself closer to the mouth underneath him and nearly collapses when Hannibal closes his mouth over him. His mouth is velvet soft and hot, his plush lips providing the perfect suction as his tongue works his cock. Will is shaking not a minute into it because, fuck, it's so much more intense like this, sitting on Hannibal Lecter's fucking face with all his blood pooling in his nethers, every nerve alive and singing, his sac pressed against Hannibal's smooth chin.

For so long, Will has had fantasies of this man - not just sexual ones, but he can't deny that he's had plenty of those, too. He never thought his feelings would be reciprocated; that this beautiful, perfect, dangerous man would ever want someone like Will. He never thought sex with another person could be this good. Even with the minor setback of premature ejaculation, which honestly wasn't a setback at all, it was already topping every experience he had ever had. There was just … *something* between them that felt like it spanned the normal boundaries of human connection, had its own language, its own heartbeat and soul.

Hannibal licks along the length of him and tongues at his balls with sloppy enthusiasm, making contented and hungry noises as he sucks him off. His honeyed eyes are taking in everything Will is doing as the younger man's muscles flex from riding Hannibal's face; hazy and half mast.

He pulls off just long enough to ask, "May I go further down?"

"Yeah," Will manages to get out.

Hannibal places his hands on Will's ass and *pulls* until Will's is almost against the headboard and not a moment later there's a hot tongue wiggling inside of him.

"F-fuck, fuck, fuck," Will pants, grinding down. "*Yes*."

His hands grip the headboard as Hannibal licks into him with slow, filthy drags of his tongue. Will wonders how the hell he can breathe down there, stuffing his face practically into Will's body, but Hannibal isn't fussing or struggling. He seems perfectly content to do this without a care for his own biological needs. The sensation of being eaten out like this is unlike anything Will can remember, and he thinks it's because he knows Hannibal doesn't see him any differently. He thinks it's because he trusts Hannibal, and trust is a heady feeling for someone who doesn't trust often.

Will experimentally grinds down onto Hannibal's face, whimpering as Hannibal only licks in deeper with a growl. His hands grip tighter at Will's ass, urging him on.

It's so fucking hot, seeing the doctor like this. Will would have never imagined that Hannibal could be such a sensual creature. Outwardly, he's a placid psychiatrist, all genteel smiles and polite manners, but the man underneath him is none of those things. He's lewd, vulgar, greedy with his hunger for it. For *Will.* The man he sees now, looking up at him as he works his mouth between his legs, is just another side that he longs to keep.

"Suck my cock," Will says, not commanding, but steering. "I want to come with my cock in your mouth."

Hannibal moans, the vibrations doing away with the last of Will's control, and obeys. He takes Will back into his mouth and sucks hard, using the tip of his tongue on the underside of Will's cock as he applies suction like Will has never experienced.

"Fuck you're good at this," Will pants. "You really are good at taking direction. So good, Hannibal. You're so good for me." Will curses himself. He can't believe those words just came out of his loose mouth. He flushes with the beginnings of orgasm and mortification and goes to backtrack, but Hannibal's eyes are rolling back into his skull as Will's words wash over him.

Will grinds down forcefully again and Hannibal only sucks him harder, licks more roughly, as if he's trying to show Will how good he wants to be for him. Will reads the older man's body language like he does a crime scene, sees the comfort in obedience, sees Hannibal sinking into his own mind in a way that shows how much he craves this, but was never afforded the opportunities to explore it.

Will grinds down harder as it hits him. His mind shows him images of a Hannibal who takes control because he feels like he has to, because he feels like that is what is expected of him. He sees images of a man, much like himself, who doesn't trust easily, can't because of who he really is. He sees that trust blooming beautifully on Hannibal's face now as Will takes what he wants, sees comfort and disbelief at finally being able to have something he never thought he'd be able to have.

Will unlocks one hand from its death grip on the headboard and sinks it into Hannibal's hair with a tight fist. Hannibal quakes beneath him, shaking apart and whimpering onto Will's cock.

He has to be sure. "Is this okay?"

Hannibal shoots him a look and then flicks his eyes down. Will looks over his shoulder at where Hannibal is hard again, leaking, thrusting his hips up into nothing but air as he twitches against his own stomach.

Will growls at the sight of it and pistons his hips faster. "I'm gonna come in your mouth, and then I'm going to ride you."

Hannibal pants against him and nods. And within seconds, with that beautiful fucking mouth working him over the edge, Will's hips lose their rhythm and he comes. Breathy, high pitched whimpers fall from his lips as he rides it out and Hannibal, beneath him, looks up at him the entire time with fierce adoration in his eyes.

Will blinks through the haze of pleasure as he rides it out. He sees something else there. Hannibal is trying to shove it back behind the mask where it belongs, but he's failing. It's still there as Will's vision clears, his body relaxing as the last waves ebb away.

Hannibal loves him.

It's more than he can take. His organs feel like they are trying to vibrate right out of his skin. Will awkwardly crawls back down so that they are face to face and kisses him deeply. "I love you, Hannibal," he says fervently, because there is no need to play games and pretend like he doesn't. There is nothing in waiting when the other man can know the truth now and be spared the torture of feeling and not knowing if it was returned.

Hannibal's mask falls apart. "Will." A tear slips down his cheek. Will licks it away. "*Will.*"

"Do we need a condom?" Will asks him, grabbing Hannibal's cock and giving it slow, firm tugs between them.

"My recent results were all negative. Are you …?"

"Hysterectomy. Had tests done three months ago, everything was clear."

"Then no," Hannibal breathes into the scant air between them. "Want you, Will. Only you, always you. Only ever you."

"You have me," he says softly, gripping Hannibal's cock. He lines them up and sinks down.

Will hasn’t used his front in some time and it feels incredibly good to have it filled again. Hannibal cries out and grips Will’s hips tightly as the younger man sinks down to the hilt. He can't help but stay there for a moment, filled completely, his inner walls still pulsating with his recent orgasm. To be filled so soon after leaves him breathless. They probably should have prepared him a little before this, but the stretch burns beautifully and Will doesn’t want this any other way.

Will plants both hands on Hannibal’s chest as he starts to move over the man moaning underneath him. Hannibal is babbling about how good Will feels, how tight and perfect he is, how splendid it is to finally, finally have him like this, and Will eats his words up, lets them flow over him and rid his nervous system of the memories of all those lonely nights pining after this man.

Their eyes meet and lock as Will slams his hips down in quick undulations. This isn’t going to last long, isn’t meant to. Will wonders if it’s always going to be like this, if they will ever be able to chill out enough for slow lovemaking or if it will always be desperate and needy as they cling to each other.

Hannibal is panting, gripping Will's ass tight and thrusting his hips up to meet his movements. His cock brushes against Will’s sensitive spot every fucking time. Will feels so close to Hannibal, their bodies joined, pleasure and love consuming them both. It’s divinity of the highest order, a consummation he had sorely needed.

From the way Hannibal is vocalizing under him, holding tight enough to bruise, Will guesses Hannibal had needed this too.

Hannibal's hands give Will's ass one last squeeze and then travel up his flexing back, over his shoulders and finally cupping both of his sweaty cheeks. The way he tugs on Will's face with a whine to try and bring him closer melts Will into a puddle. His own hands move from their spot on Hannibal's chest to the bed on either side of the other man's head. Their foreheads touch, eyes open and locked as Will swivels his hips down in deep grinds against Hannibal's crotch. The change in angle, the intimacy, makes Will shake.

Hannibal, beneath him, is no better off. His muscles tremble and flex with pleasure as he undulates his hips under Will's. Will can feel Hannibal move his legs to plant his feet on the bed for better leverage. Will lets out a startled whimper, face scrunched up in pleasure as Hannibal's cock grinds with agonizing accuracy against the sensitive patch of flesh on his upper wall. God, he can feel it down to his toes, curled up tightly as they make love.

For long moments, they stay just like that, staring at each other unwaveringly as they move against each other and pant into each other's mouths. Will has never experienced anything like this. He's ruined for anyone else.

Soft kisses happen intermittently as they fuck slow and deep. With his plush lips right there for the taking, Will can't seem to help himself. Their kisses smack loudly in the space between them, one after the other, eyes open the entire time so they don't miss a single second.

Will can feel when Hannibal's cock starts twitching tellingly inside of him long moments later. Hannibal's eyes screw shut before opening again and when they do, they are wet and shining. His movements are getting desperate. He can't stop uttering Will's name. His grip on Will's face tightens even as he strokes his thumbs gently over the apples of his cheeks.

“Will,” Hannibal pants, "My Will. Mine, *mine*." And then he's reaching down between them to stroke Will’s cock with his fingers. Will gasps and leans back a bit to give Hannibal more room to work, his hands fisting the sheets on either side of Hannibal’s head. His walls clench around him as he rides him hard and fast, his balls bouncing with his relentless movements as he, himself, edges closer.

Hannibal is moaning near constantly now as Will moves relentlessly on top of him. His reddish-brown eyes are glazed over, his mouth gaping. He wants to know so badly what Hannibal is feeling, what he’s thinking, if he’s thinking at all.

“Tell me,” Will struggles to get out. “Fuck. Tell me how I feel.”

“Will. So good. So good, *mylimasis* . I can’t … ah – *ah* – I can’t.”

Will can understand him, but just barely; his accent is thick in his throat and he’s grunting and panting between his words so much that his voice sounds disjointed, but Will pieces together what he can glean and it makes his hips move faster, in tight circles that constantly have Hannibal’s thick cock stimulating his spot. That along with the attention to his little cock has him collapsing forward onto Hannibal’s chest as he explodes with a drawn out roar, exclaiming his pleasure into Hannibal’s bite wound. He bites at him again as he rides his cock, rides out his second orgasm, so much stronger than his first for being filled and having something to clamp down on.

Hannibal shudders under him, practically writhing out of his skin. “Will – ” is all he can get out when his mouth drops open in a silent scream as he comes, filling Will with his hot seed so deep, Will doubts he’ll ever leave him. After a few seconds of dead silence, the noise Hannibal emits as he empties doesn’t even sound human. Will, despite the oversensitivity, continues to bounce on Hannibal’s cock to help the other man ride it out. The wet squelching sounds fill Will’s ears like music.

The movement of Will’s hips eventually turn into softer rolls as he feels Hannibal softening inside of him. Hannibal reaches up and stills Will’s hips, gives one last full body shudder as he falls back onto the bed struggling to catch his breath.

Will, already touching his chest to the other man’s from where he collapsed, brings his mouth to Hannibal’s for a sweet, slow kiss. Hannibal reciprocates eagerly, gripping each of Will’s ass cheeks possessively before sliding his hands up to Will’s back, tracing the shapes his muscles create.

It’s quiet as they come down, sharing kisses that speak of devotion unmatched, staring into each other’s eyes while they do.

Will nuzzles his nose against Hannibal’s. “Take a bath with me.”

“As soon as I can move, we shall.” Hannibal smiles, wide and goofy from the chemicals streaming through his blood. Will loves the look of it on him. After a few moments, though, Hannibal’s face turns serious. Will’s breath catches, already thinking the worst, that he’s about to bring up Will’s little *I love you* slip up, tell him he doesn’t feel the same despite what Will knows he saw. But instead, he says, “Tell me you can stay tonight.”

Will breathes a sigh of relief. He nods against Hannibal’s forehead, speaking softly. “Dogs are taken care of until morning, but I’ll need to leave early tomorrow.”

“I’ll take it,” Hannibal says, cupping his cheeks and bringing him back down for a sweet kiss, then another. “Will. I feel the same,” he whispers. The way he says it is almost hesitant.

The words strike through Will’s heart with a suddenness that makes the nasty doubt in his mind creep up. He can feel Hannibal’s love – with his empathy and the weight of Hannibal’s feelings, it’s difficult not to – but something still rubs at Will the wrong way. Maybe because of how Hannibal had said it, maybe because of Will’s own laughable sense of self-worth.

“You don’t have to say it because I did,” Will assures him. “You’re here with me, and that’s more than enough.”

Hannibal shakes his head. “But I do, Will … fiercely. Without logic or reason, I love you,” the older man proclaims seriously.

“Hopefully there is some reason,” Will quips lightly, stroking down the side of Hannibal’s face to show he’s not upset. “It can’t be because of the abundance of dog hair and horrible aftershave, surely.”

But Hannibal doesn’t take the bait to lighten the mood. His eyes are dark and his brow is furrowed in concern. “Because of those things and so much more. You alone can see me. You’re the only person I want to.”

Hannibal has no idea how right he is, but now is not the time for that particular conversation. Will doesn’t necessarily want to be having the conversation they’re having right now, either. He should have waited to say it. It’s too soon. He feels like he ruined things before they could even start.

“Let’s go take a bath, and see to your shoulder,” he suggests, already starting to pull away.

Hannibal sighs and doesn’t move except to grip Will tighter and pull him back down. Will can’t help but melt at the gesture. Hannibal leans up and kisses him, licking across Will’s lips and only gripping the younger man to him tighter when Will opens his mouth to him. After a few minutes, Hannibal pulls away reluctantly. “Do you not believe me, Will?”

“I – I do,” Will protests. “I can feel it. I guess I just. I want to make sure you weren’t only saying it to keep things from getting awkward. I know it’s soon, but I’ve known for a long time.” Shit. “I mean, I’ve known *you* for a long time,” he corrects quickly. “It was building quicker than I could control. And before I knew it, it was there.”

“Hush,” Hannibal says, stroking the side of his face. “You don’t need to explain yourself. If you have something to be ashamed of, then we both do. You can’t imagine how long I’ve wanted you,” Hannibal says against his mouth, kissing him again, “I mean it with everything I am.”

Will nods after a moment. He believes him. Hearing the words is different than just the amorphous feeling he was getting, and still is. He lets it flow over him like water over parched soil. It fills in all the cracks and hydrates what once was barren. “Okay.”

Hannibal slips out of Will’s body and they both sigh at the loss before they get up to go to Hannibal’s en suite, Hannibal helping him off the bed because his legs are shaking. Will feels a glob of cum leak out of his hole as he follows Hannibal to the tub and winces.

Once they are in the bathroom, Will leans against the doorframe and watches. Hannibal is uniquely beautiful; the perfect balance of strength and softness. When he bends over to start the water, Will can’t help but to bite his lip, appreciating the view of his ass and the soft hint of balls just underneath.

When Hannibal turns around and catches Will looking, Will doesn’t pretend like he wasn’t. Hannibal, in turn, runs his eyes down Will’s own body. “You really are a beautiful man,” he says softly.

Will flushes lightly, but doesn’t move to hide himself away. He hates compliments. They always seem so empty, but he can feel how much Hannibal means it. So instead of fighting it, he says, “You too.”

They step into the tub after it’s done filling, Will first, and then Hannibal in front of him. They settle back into hot water with a sigh of appreciation, Hannibal’s back to Will’s front.

“May I ask you a question?” Hannibal asks.

“Sure,” Will responds, getting the washcloth Hannibal had set out and working some soap into it. It smells like citrus and cedar. He takes the sudsy cloth to Hannibal’s shoulders and begins cleaning off the dried blood.

Hannibal leans into it. “Do you hide your beauty on purpose?”

It gives Will pause, even though he doesn’t stop the motions of his hands - one cleaning Hannibal and the other stroking along his soft belly.

“I guess. I can afford nicer clothes, ones that fit better, but. I don’t like standing out. I used to always get attention down at the docks when I worked with my dad. Baggier clothes hid what I wished wasn’t there. Habit stuck.”

“Understandably so,” Hannibal sighs, grinding his plush little ass into Will’s crotch. Will nips his ear affectionately. “As uncouth as it is, I would have likely been one of them.”

“Would have?” Will jokes. “You haven’t exactly been sneaky about checking out my ass every chance you get.”

“I haven’t tried to be. I was hoping for a confrontation, no matter which way it went. Even if it was negative, at least I’d know. It’s been agony wondering if my feelings were returned.”

“You weren’t worried about seeming unprofessional?”

“I was at first. My priorities quickly changed when I realized how badly I had to have you.”

Will does pause his ministrations at that. “How long?”

Hannibal hesitates. “After Tobias, when you walked into my office, alive, it struck me that my feelings for you were not merely what I had thought them to be. I had thought you dead. My whole world changed, as did my priorities. Around the time I took you to Dr. Sutcliffe, when you were sick, I finally allowed myself to fully embrace my love for you; to hell with the consequences.”

At the admission, Will holds Hannibal a little tighter.

That had been months ago.

“All this time,” Will says, “I’ve been convincing myself that there’s no way someone like you could want someone like me. I was … successful.”

“And who is someone like me? Who is someone like you?”

Will moves the cloth down to Hannibal’s strong chest and begins to scrub in gentle circles now that the bite wound Will had left him is cleaned up. “I suppose I don’t know anymore. We still have so much to learn about each other.”

“Do you regret saying it?”

Will answers immediately. “No, I don’t. We'll just have to learn as we go.”

“I am willing to if you are,” Hannibal says, relaxing back into Will’s chest. “I want to know everything about you. You already know a great deal more about me than anyone.”

On the inside, Will’s beast howls with pleasure. “Thank you. For your trust.”

Hannibal falters at that. “I do trust you, Will.”

Will doesn’t respond. He knows he doesn’t have to. He continues washing Hannibal in intimate silence, and when he’s done, he cleans himself up perfunctorily. Hannibal protests this, but Will gently hushes him with soft kisses to his forehead, his cheeks, his nose.

“I just want to get back to bed. You can do the honors next time.”

“Alright,” Hannibal agrees after a moment, appeased at the prospect of a next time.

Once they are dried off and back in bed, Hannibal turns to Will and opens his arms. Will falls into them easily, as if they’ve been doing this for years. Will settles into the hold comfortably, when a question floats up to the surface of his mind.

“I have a question for you, now.”

“Ask away,” Hannibal says.

“Why brew beer if you don’t drink it? Why not make wine?”

It’s a simple enough question, but Hannibal’s reaction is strange. The silence that settles between them is heavy like lead, crushing Will under its weight. He sits up to better look at the other man. Hannibal’s eyes are focused on Will’s chest, where he starts to draw random patterns with the tips of his soft fingers, still slightly pruned from their bath.

“Hannibal?”

“I originally brewed that batch for Alana Bloom," he says after a while.

Will feels like the air has been punched out of him.

Alana and Hannibal have known each other for many years, Hannibal had been her mentor for christ's sake. Of course they were close. Will was just being ridiculous.

But still, something is clearing on the horizon of his mind, bringing into full picture something that makes him feel sick to his stomach.

“You gave me the beer that was meant for her. You bought a brewing kit with the sole purpose of pleasing her,” Will struggles to get the words out, but keeps his tone as level as he can. “You were courting her.”

Hannibal blinks, blinks again before he speaks, “It’s not so serious as you make it sound, I assure you.”

Will’s eyes soften as he meets the other man’s gaze. “Seems like a lot of trouble for something that’s not serious.”

Hannibal hesitates again. “When you learn of why, it will paint me in an unflattering light.”

Will doubts anything can be worse than killing and eating people, but he can’t say that. “You said you trusted me. Trust me now.”

Hannibal sighs. “My intentions were merely a means to an end with her.”

The picture in his mind clears fully, solidifies. His chest feels hot as he tries to calm himself down. He knows how he’s acting, but he can’t seem to control himself, especially so soon after they had shared such intimate space.

She was going to be Hannibal’s alibi, he knows that’s what Hannibal is saying without saying.

He hates thinking it, but his mind was always one to consider every negative possibility. It paints for him the possibility of Hannibal keeping that particular avenue open just so, just enough to meander down again to Alana should his relationship with Will fall through.

But Will couldn't say any of that. Hannibal would have no reason to need an alibi, the Chesapeake Ripper would. Will isn't ready to show his hand yet. It's too soon.

"You were letting her think there was something there," Will says instead. "You were going to use her."

A beat. "Yes."

He was expecting the answer, but it still hurt to hear. Will doesn't ask for clarification and Hannibal doesn't offer it. "And me?"

Hannibal's eyes widen a fraction as he sits up. Within seconds, he's crowding even closer into Will's space and using his heavier weight to push Will onto his back. One of Hannibal's arms cages him in from the left, while the hand of the other arm rests tenderly in the center of his smooth chest. Will realizes he's trying to keep him from leaving. There's something desperate in Hannibal's eyes as he says, "I am not using you. Do not ever insinuate that again."

Will struggles a bit in his hold, not because he wants to leave, but just to show Hannibal he can. "Bit hard to believe at the moment," Will snips.

"And what would I have to gain from using you, Will?"

Will lets out a hysterical chuckle. "Oh, wow. Thanks. Nice to know I have nothing to offer you that Alana can't."

Hannibal sighs and pinches his eyes closed. "That is not how I meant it and you know it."

Will does, but it feels good to be petulant. "What did you have to gain from Alana that you can't gain from me, Hannibal?"

Will realizes how ridiculous he's being - jealous of someone Hannibal had planned to *use* and picking a fight over it, but the jealousy inside of him is rattling against its cage and longs to be soothed.

"She was to provide me a social cover." So, an alibi. "I ended that particular course when I realized how I felt about *you*. You cannot provide me with what I was seeking from her because you offer me something no one else can."

"And what's that?" Will asks testily from his position lying prone beneath the older man.

Hannibal's face softens, first his eyes, then his mouth. "Something real," he says with quiet wonder.

Oh.

Something real. Because the Chesapeake Ripper can never let anyone else know who he is. No one else but Will is allowed to see because no one else has the potential to understand, to fully accept.

He feels himself relax incrementally, his jealousy mostly soothed.

Will sighs and scrubs a hand over his face. Hannibal takes that hand and kisses it, holding it to his own chest.

“My relationship with Dr. Bloom has been professional and will remain that way. I promise you that, Will, and I always keep my promises. There is no one else but you," he says earnestly. "You've never had anything to worry about. If you wish, I can cease even being friendly with her."

“Jesus, I don’t want you to end your friendship with her.” Only, he does. The thought of even a friendly hug between them sets his blood to boil. God, he hates that he's like this. "I just. I want you to stop doing what you've been doing with her. Stop doing anything that you wouldn't do if I was there. And stop brewing beer for her.”

"I will. I'll toss everything I made, even the brewing kit." Hannibal kisses his forehead. “She means nothing to me, Will.”

Will swallows. It’s exactly what he needed to hear. “Thank you.”

“You know,” Hannibal says lightly with a raised eyebrow, “you are the one who kissed her.”

“I was sick," Will protests, frowning.

“Is that the only reason? I recall you saying to me that she was very kissable.”

Will flushes slightly, caught out; a complete hypocrite, he knows. “Alright, so I did. Doesn’t mean I didn’t find you kissable. Your lips are prettier.”

Hannibal leans down and kisses Will with those pretty lips, slowly opening the younger man’s mouth with his tongue and delving inside. “Do you still find her kissable, Will?”

“No one holds a candle to you,” Will assures. “I haven’t even thought of her like that since after that kiss between her and I.”

“Good,” Hannibal says, voice dropping a few octaves. “Because I do not share.”

Will looks at Hannibal, really looks at him, taking in the way the light from the fire plays across the angles of his face, highlighting the honey notes in his hair. There was an ocean between them before, but now it’s dissipating, the water receding back to lesser levels, and they’re able to stand on the seafloor again, able to breathe.

“You like that I’m a jealous bastard,” Will notes with a lightly speculative tone.

Hannibal grins with teeth. “I do.”

Will huffs out a frustrated, but fond, breath. “Don’t encourage it. It’s ugly.”

“It’s you, and I will not stifle you.”

Will knows he won't, knows because he would rather chew off his own arm than stifle the man in turn. Hannibal accepts him as is, no change required, but that doesn't mean he can't do a little self reflection. Just because he's dating a cannibalistic serial killer doesn't give him a pass to be an incorrigible asshole.

"And when it gets to be too much?" Will asks, running his hands up the length of Hannibal's back.

"Then we will have a conversation as any two healthy adults would."

Will could laugh for the comicality of it. The two of them. Healthy. It was laughable.

Will rolls them over until he's on top. He loves the feeling of chest hair against him, loves the feeling of Hannibal's soft cock nestled against his thigh, loves this man with a fierceness that borders on terrifying. The secret he keeps is lodged in his throat, mercilessly clanging around the tunnels of flesh underneath his skin, wanting out.

Now would be the perfect time. There is open and honest communication between them already, adding to it would be easier now rather than waiting for another opening. There will come a point in time where they will grow closer and the truth will be harder to spill. Will doesn't want to wait that long, just long enough to where he knows he won't be dinner.

The press of their lips is easy and soft, unhurried with a delicate edge of innocence as they learn the shape of each other's lips. The air is sweet with rising tension as Will grinds his hips down, not to lead to anything, just because he can.

Hannibal sighs into his mouth, stroking his hands through Will's hair and holding him there to kiss him deeper. They kiss and explore each other well into the morning light as the beginnings of dawn kiss the horizon just as intimately, and when they finally fall asleep, Will sleeps free of dreams for the first time in years. His nightmares don't hold a candle to the nightmare holding him close to his chest, nuzzling sweetly into his neck.

Chapter End Notes

Gosh, I've really gone and made Will a jealous little bitch, haven't I?

Next chapter will be out in about a week. I just need to do some editing.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Our silly little cannibals spend the day together. Hannibal struggles to keep his pants on.

Chapter Notes

I hope everyone made it through the DDoS attack intact. Life is ugly and all we have is fanfiction.

If recent events have taught me anything, it's not to take Ao3 and the wonderful writers that spend countless hours entertaining us for granted. I will admit, I'm not the biggest commenter, but I will be from here on out. It was torture not having my bedtime stories and not knowing when I would have my comfort cannibals back. Am I being dramatic? Maybe. But fanfiction is super important to me, and I need to show it a little better.

Thank you to everyone who has left kudos, comments, and had stray thoughts about my fic. This is wonderful to write and I'm having a lot of fun even if I'm suffering a writer's block at the moment. No cause for concern, this story will be completed in a timely manner, but boy this is deffo going in a different direction than what I first anticipated!

Sorry for the delay in posting. DDoS. You know how it is.

Stay safe, take care, and please enjoy.

The next morning, Will wakes up to heat along the length of his back and strong arms loosely wrapped around his chest, as well as something hard and damp poking into his left ass cheek. He smirks into his pillow. It deeply amuses him to know that even the infallible Doctor Lecter still got morning wood.

Will, himself, is feeling a little randy, especially with the feeling of Hannibal's leaking cock pressed against him and – god, he even leaks in his *sleep* – but he has dogs to feed and take out if he doesn't want to come home to piss and shit all over his floor.

With a grumpy sigh, Will stretches his back and legs until he hears a satisfying pop and breathes out at the feeling. The arms around his chest tighten and the leg slotted between his own shifts up so that the older man's thigh is directly against Will's crotch.

Hannibal's breathing is still deep and even, but he's like that even when he's awake. Will loathes the idea of moving, but he rolls over to check. When he does, he sees beautiful mahogany eyes peering at him from under a fan of blonde eyelashes, flecked green and brown in the morning sun.

Will smiles. "Hi."

"Hello," Hannibal smiles back, all sleepy and soft. Will supposes even apex predators have their cute moments. "I hope you slept well?"

"Like a baby." Will leans over and kisses him, uncaring of either of their morning breaths. Hannibal doesn't make a fuss about it either.

It's peaceful and quiet in the room, the embers from the logs last night finally having gone to sleep sometime in the night. Hannibal drags a finger along the length of Will's forearm, traveling up his thick biceps and then back down reverently. "Are you busy next weekend?"

Next weekend - that's so far away, unacceptably far. Will suppresses his frown and tries for coy, but is sure he fails miserably. "Is that when I'm going to see you next?"

"Hopefully not," Hannibal breathes quietly into the space between them. "I will be rather busy next week, however. I'm afraid I have a full schedule." Will purses his lips in a pout. Hannibal clicks his tongue and leans in to kiss it away.

"I suppose we'll have to see, then," Will replies sullenly. "What's next weekend?"

Hannibal hums, looking just about as happy as Will does at the prospect of such a long time between visits. "I am throwing a dinner party next Saturday." Ah, so he will be busy murdering people. "I was hoping you would entertain the notion of possibly attending."

The peace and quiet turns into absolute silence in Will's mind. A dinner party. A swanky one, if he knows Hannibal, and he does. Sure to be filled with flamboyantly grandiose socialites and hollow conversations about art and culture. Will can already feel his stomach churning at the thought of attending, can already see it on Hannibal's face that he expects to be refused and is either too disappointed to truly hide it or he's showing just enough to manipulate Will into saying yes. Regardless, he knows if he says no, the disappointment will be genuine.

He has nothing to wear except the one suit he owns, ill fitting and bland. He would stick out like a sore thumb amongst the glittering gowns and bedazzled bosoms and the smart tuxedos. He would look poor, like he doesn't belong, because he doesn't. That's not his world. It's Hannibal's.

For the first time since this began, he starts having doubts that he'll ever fit here. That Hannibal won't leave for something better, that Will won't just be the joke of the evening, brought only to entertain the snooty masses. Here in the quiet of Hannibal's bedroom, he fits, but there is a world outside of here ready to showcase all the evidence of why Will doesn't belong, and Will would be helpless but to listen.

"How many people?"

“My guestlist includes twelve. So far only nine have confirmed their attendance.”

Nine people. Possibly twelve. Possibly more, if someone brings along an uninvited guest. Hannibal likely wouldn’t outwardly disapprove of such a thing and would be too polite to refuse them.

“That’s. A lot of people. How would I be introduced?” Will asks hesitantly, plucking at Hannibal's duvet.

“I would respect your wishes to keep our relationship clandestine and introduce you as my colleague and dear friend.”

Will's gut reaction is a resounding *the fuck you will,* but he keeps quiet. The words sting, but they have no right to. Will had asked for that, and Hannibal was nice enough to respect it. That, or Hannibal was trying to get a rise out of him so that Will would change his mind and they may proclaim their relationship openly. He wouldn’t put it past him, but it seems like such a ploy is beyond even Hannibal; too gauche, too unsubtle, too *rude.*

“Will Alana be attending?”

“She will be, as well as Jack and Bella.”

Something with claws stirs listlessly in Will’s stomach. Alana will be there, and Will will be introduced as a *friend*. It’s enough to seal the deal on him not going, not having to deal with it. Will is excellent at running away and avoiding his problems until they catch up with him and bite him in the ass. He isn’t sure he wants this particular beast to.

But that would mean attending.

Attending would mean small talk and conspicuous stares as these people judge and try to piece together just what Count Hannibal Lecter VIII is doing with a poor country hick like Will Graham. The images of such an event settle like sour milk in Will’s stomach, but the alternative is worse.

No worse, though, than being introduced as a *friend*.

“I’ll come,” Will says with a put upon sigh. “You’ll introduce me as yours.”

“Will I?” Hannibal asks. The hope in his voice is so obvious that Will momentarily feels awful at wanting to keep them a secret in the first place. The besotted look on Hannibal's face dissolves most of the sourness in the pit of his stomach and softens him.

“You will,” Will confirms.

Hannibal smiles something beatific. “What term would you prefer? My lover? My beau?” Hannibal pauses, licking his lips. “My partner, perhaps?”

“I like that one. Lover sounds like all we do is fuck, and beau sounds like it’s not serious.”

Hannibal laughs. Will loves the sound of it. “I prefer that one as well.”

Will, already dreading next weekend, gives Hannibal one last smooch before rolling out of the plush bed he doesn't want to leave. Hannibal makes a discontented noise at Will's exit.

"Dogs," is all Will says as he starts to get dressed. Hannibal is honest to god pouting at him, and Will folds like a cheesecloth. "Would you like to … spend the day with me? Since it'll be a while before we see each other next?"

Hannibal is out of bed before Will can even finish his sentence. "I would love to," he proclaims cheerfully.

Will smirks to himself, shaking his head at the obvious pleasure his invitation elicited, and goes about getting dressed.

"I was going to go fishing, catch some dinner, but I don't have anything for breakfast or lunch at the house that you would approve of," Will says as he tucks his shirt into his jeans and pulls on his sweater. "You may want to bring some stuff."

"Then I shall," Hannibal replies, going into his closet to get some fresh clothes. He comes back out with a cable knit red pullover and a pair of khaki dress pants and begins dressing after selecting a pair of underwear. Will watches as he dresses, appreciating his musculature as he moves and the sway of his still half-hard, uncut cock as he steps into a pair of white briefs that look soft as silk.

Hannibal smirks at him as he watches, and he realizes that his mouth is slightly open, so he closes it quickly and rolls his eyes. "Yeah, yeah. You're hot."

Hannibal steps into his pants and does them up. "You think I wasn't watching as you dressed? You're like David come to life."

Will flushes and looks down at the carpeted floor, tracing the patterns of the rug under the ottoman to avoid his instinctual rebuttal of the compliment. Will files through his memory and comes across the sculpture Hannibal refers to of a man with curly hair and a small penis, if he's remembering correctly. He wants to laugh, but doesn't want to be mistaken for being rude, so he allows a smile instead.

"Yeah, I guess we're of the same size," he responds dryly. He's far from offended. It feels different having the entirety of his body complimented, as if his genitals were something beautiful to someone other than himself. Different, but not bad. Just something he's not used to.

"Botticelli curls, muscular legs and arms, a striking profile." Hannibal then grins at him lasciviously. "And quite callipygian."

Will's face is so hot he could fry an egg on it. "Oh my god, please stop," he pleads halfheartedly. He's never been on the receiving end of such honest flattery and it's making his head spin.

After Hannibal is done pulling on his socks, he walks over to Will and pulls him into a loose hug, stroking his hands down Will's back and down, down to his ass which he grips in greedy

handfuls. “This is perhaps one of my favorite parts of you physically,” Hannibal whispers hotly into his ear, nipping the lobe.

“Dirty old man,” Will sighs and wiggles into Hannibal’s massaging hands.

“It’s what you bring out in me. I can’t seem to control myself around you,” Hannibal laments. Will understands that this is said both playfully and seriously, understands that control to someone like Hannibal is important, instinctual, and the loss of it over a single person is perplexing and strange, perhaps even terrifying.

“You’re going to have to next weekend lest you scandalize all your distinguished guests.”

“Will I?” Hannibal asks, giving his ass one last affectionate squeeze before settling his hands on Will’s hips. “Or won’t I?”

“You will,” Will says with a stern look. “I’ll be uncomfortable enough as it is.”

“I don’t wish for you to be uncomfortable,” Hannibal frowns.

“It’s unavoidable. I want," Will trails off, running his hand up Hannibal's chest. "I want to be seen with you.”

“As do I.”

They stare at each other for a moment longer, brown into blue, and Hannibal leans in for a chaste kiss that sticks their lips together. “Let’s go home to your dogs. They will never forgive me if I’m the reason their breakfast is late.”

Will doesn’t miss that Hannibal refers to his house as *home.* Something soft and warm unfurls in his chest. “Wear appropriate footwear. You’re coming to the stream with me.”

“I shall be along shortly. I’d like to finish grooming and pack a few things.”

Will nods and leans in for another kiss. It feels like heaven to be able to exchange such casual intimacy with him. “See you soon.”

When Hannibal arrives, he comes with an insulated tote in one hand and a satchel over his shoulder. A smile deepens the creases around his eyes handsomely as he walks up the porch steps to where Will is sitting with a mug of steaming hot coffee. The dogs are happily roaming the yard, a few coming up to Hannibal to give him a cursory sniff before trotting off back into fields surrounding his little house.

“Hey, you,” Will says with a grin, getting out of his lone chair and walking up to Hannibal.

“Hey, yourself,” Hannibal says softly, leaning in for a kiss which Will happily provides. It lasts long seconds as they open their mouths for each other before Will breaks it off with one last, swift peck.

“Let me take those for you.”

“Thank you.”

Will takes the tote and bag inside while Hannibal follows him in and starts putting away what he presumes Hannibal brought for lunch, Hannibal setting aside what he intends to make for breakfast.

Breakfast is a simple affair of protein scramble, a call back to their first meal together. They eat in companionable silence with their feet touching tangled the table. Every once in a while, they look up from their plates to see the other man watching them. They grin shyly and look away when they confirm that they are.

They do the dishes side by side, this time Will washing and Hannibal rinsing. As they are drying them off, Will notices Hannibal seems a little more quiet than usual.

“Everything alright?” Will asks him.

Hannibal sucks his lower lip between his teeth. “I was considering something.”

Will nods, having figured as much. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“It may be too soon. I wouldn’t wish to scare you off.”

Will frowns at the older man, a man who is always so sure of himself as to come across as cocky on occasion. “You won’t.”

Hannibal huffs a laugh that sounds forced. “You can’t know that until I say it,” he says, putting the last of the dishes away.

Since their task is done, and he would have even if it weren’t, Will steps closer into Hannibal’s personal space and wraps his arms around his Ripper in a tight hug. “Trust me, Hannibal. I do know.”

Hannibal mimics Will and holds him close. Will can feel the muscles of Hannibal’s arms working to not hold him too tightly.

“I … enjoy this domesticity. I enjoyed waking up to you this morning, cooking you breakfast. I envisioned a scenario where I wake up from a bed we share and let you sleep in while I attend to our dogs, and then cook for us, sipping coffee at our table while our feet brush underneath every morning.”

Will cuddles in closer, letting the beauty of such an image wash over him. It brings to heart security and something Will never thought he’d have – a home. Wolf trap has been home enough, but he’s always considered it more of just a place he lived, a feeling he had to get

used to and cement in his mind as a child moving from city to city, house to house, never settling down and never growing roots.

Hannibal is home to him. It doesn't matter how short a time they've been together, or what secrets they both still hold. He considers Hannibal home.

"I'd like that," Will says into Hannibal's chest, quickly enough so that he doesn't leave the other man on the edge of his seat, but slowly enough to show he has considered it. "I really would."

"If a patient came to me with these thoughts after such a short time, I would warn them they were moving too fast," Hannibal says thoughtfully.

"We are allowed to grow as people. Maybe the man you were five minutes ago isn't the man you are now."

Hannibal hums at that, charmed. "Every time we touch, we are remade."

"And every thought we have reshapes us," Will agrees. "We would need to wait. There's a lot to consider. But, I'm not opposed to the idea. I just want you to know that."

Hannibal kisses the top of his head and continues to hold him. "Thank you, Will." Will can tell that Hannibal is annoyed at himself for needing the reassurance, but Will is only too happy to give it. It only serves to remind him of how human Hannibal really is.

"What else did you bring with you?" Will asks into the silence, hoping whatever mood Hannibal had gotten himself into is broken.

"My sketchbook and some utensils. I was hoping to draw you while you fished."

"I don't know that I'll be able to concentrate with eyes on me."

"You seem to concentrate just fine when you are unaware of my eyes on you."

God, this man. Will snuggles closer into Hannibal's chest so he doesn't see his face heating up. He can probably smell it this close. "That's different."

"Perhaps so. In any case, I can always sketch the wildlife and maybe the foliage. It will, however, not be nearly as beautiful a portrait as you would make."

God. This *man.* "Okay. Fine. You can sketch me," Will relents with a secret smile.

Will dresses in his waders and something warm while Hannibal puts together their lunch and gathers a blanket to sit on. They make their way down to Will's stream with seven happy dogs in tow, all fighting over sticks they come across on the way there. Will watches as Buster, the most riley of them all, trots along beside Hannibal with a stick larger than him in his mouth and stifles a laugh at the expectant look on the pup's face. Hannibal sighs and bends down, throwing it with amazing strength and grace far ahead of them on the well beaten path.

Buster runs after it on his stubby little legs with happy pants and yips, growling at Max who tries to take it from him. They fight over the stick and, despite his smaller size, Buster wins.

“I see why you don’t own a T.V,” Hannibal remarks dryly. “Why long after another form of entertainment when you have dear old Buster?”

Will laughs, free and from deep in his belly. “Why, indeed. You own a T.V. Do you ever watch it?” he asks curiously. He can't really picture Hannibal watching sitcoms.

“I do not. It’s there as decoration only, I’m afraid.” Much like everything else in his house, but Will doesn’t comment.

Instead, he saunters up to Hannibal as they walk along the path and sidles up close to him, wrapping a possessive arm low around his waist and pulling the older man closer. Hannibal lets out a delighted laugh at the gesture, and utters his name under his breath when Will reaches down for a good handful of ass.

Hannibal turns his head to raise one barely-there eyebrow at his companion. Will just smirks. “What? It’s nice. You can’t blame a guy.”

“Were you anyone else, that hand would be made into a soup.”

Oh, Will is aware. “Good thing I’m me.”

“Yes,” Hannibal agrees with an easy smile. “I do quite like you.”

“I quite like you, too,” Will replies, mimicking Hannibal’s cadence. Hannibal, instead of being offended, just huffs a small laugh and turns away quickly. His smile lingers. Will looks at it, a smile forming on his own lips. Hannibal looks good happy. “We won’t be here for long. Maybe a few hours, but we can leave whenever you say the word.”

“And if you have not caught us dinner by the time I wish to leave?”

“I’ll catch somethin’, don’ you worry ‘bout that,” Will drawls, letting his long suppressed accent come out strong and clear. Hannibal’s reaction is unexpected. Will had thought, at best, he wouldn’t react at all, but instead, a flush stains the apples of the older man’s cheeks and his gaze drops to Will’s mouth.

“I wish you’d speak that way more often,” Hannibal says.

Will shrugs. “Yours is beautiful. Makes you sound exotic, intelligent. Mine makes me sound stupid. People don’t take me seriously.”

“I would never mistake you as being unintelligent, nor would I ever take you less seriously.”

Will bumps his shoulder with his own. “I know you wouldn’t. It’s not second nature anymore, not unless I’m back down south. Or drunk.”

They reach Will’s stream after another ten minutes of walking. Will helps Hannibal set out the blanket and puts the cooler for the fish on top of one corner. Zoe, Ellie, and Max set up

shop on the blanket, leaving Hannibal little room. Hannibal looks down at them with a stern expression and Max gets the picture, the smart boy. He moves to lay by the cooler, leaving Hannibal some more room.

“Thank you, Max, that was very kind of you,” Hannibal says to him seriously, scratching behind his ears as a reward as the man settles down with his sketchbook and charcoals.

Will watches the scene unfold as he baits his hook, a small smile playing at his lips. Being a serial killer is one thing, but being rude to his dogs would be a deal-breaker.

Will listens to the occasional rustle of the nipping wind through the canopy of leaves above him while he names his bait, a beautiful, shimmering red and gold creation with sparrow's bones, and casts his line into the cold, flowing water. He stills as he waits for his first catch. He takes in a deep breath, scenting the clean water and detritus, and exhales slowly, letting his mind fall quiet, letting everything else but the sensation of eyes on his person fall away.

He doesn’t look over at the bank where Hannibal and his pack are, doesn’t need to. He knows he’s being observed, and he thought it would make his skin crawl, but instead, he feels buoyant with joy, still unbelieving that he has this now.

Will can’t remember the last serious relationship he had. The only one that came close had been a girl he was seeing in college. Things had developed quickly, because with Will they usually do. They had dated, slept in the same bed, showered together. Will had even met her parents and pulled together a passable personality to suit the occasion.

It hadn’t lasted past a few months, Amanda citing that she was just too straight to be with a guy like him. Will, despite the sting those words caused, preferred that lie to the truth he knew existed. He had accidentally let some of the darkness he hides get too close to the surface. Maybe it was something he said, maybe it was how he had discovered her own faults with ease when he hadn’t meant to. It was more difficult to control back when he was younger, his empathy a serrated edge that cut him and everyone else along with him.

Will remembers her face as she had told him it wouldn’t work – shuttered, eyes flicking nervously as if she was scared of how he would react. He remembers, too, how people had looked at him after that. With trepidation, with fear.

Will lets himself glance over at Hannibal. The other man is deep in his drawing, lower lip half between his teeth as his hand moves across the page of his sketchbook. Hannibal isn’t afraid of him, doesn’t look at him like he’s crazy, even when he was. Hannibal doesn’t fear his mind. He relishes it. Will thinks there is a distinct possibility that what he tries to hide in the deep, dark depths of his mind is being slowly encouraged to the surface.

He’s not angry about it, if it’s true. Curiosity is in Hannibal’s nature and it would make sense that he would try by any means necessary to forge a bond soaked in darkness, a soul to match his own. He had seen right through Will from that first day, right off the bat.

Associations come quickly to you.

Your barriers and decency are present, yet shocked, at your associations. Appalled at your dreams.

No forts in the bone arena of your skull for things you love.

Will had been furious then, shocked into silence, anger making him defensive. He had snapped his jaws at the doctor that first day without thinking, having been read so well, having his secrets bellowed out into the room in accented words. It had been too much for his control to keep him quiet and polite.

At the time, Will had hated Hannibal Lecter, even as he found him strikingly beautiful. Will had worked so hard over the course of his life to be a good person. He had worked tirelessly and endlessly to make decisions that would keep him on the right path. The police academy, a double degree in forensic science and forensic psychology when that didn't work out. A teaching post when his dreams of being an FBI agent fell through.

Too unstable. Both sides of him too much at war to ever create any kind of balance. Will had no equilibrium because the foundations of his values had been built on sand, and it had shown.

He had answered the questions too well. He had given answers too neatly wrapped. The mask that Will wore had been bright, but not bright enough to blind. Made of cellophane.

Hannibal looks up from his drawing and sees Will watching him. He smiles with his eyes, focusing them into points that flick quickly across Will's face, before going back to his sketch.

There was no denying he felt peace now, even if it was just in little snippets. It was more than he had ever had before. Balance was a battle inside him he was slowly winning with Hannibal's guidance. The grounds of his mind still shift, still quake, but lately that's been less and less. Even if Hannibal is trying to bring something out in him, something Will has fought down his entire life, in doing so, he has only helped him.

Something catches on his hook and, with a satisfied smile, Will reels it in. He can feel Hannibal watching him, more intently now that his goal is not to render his likeness, but to simply observe something he has never seen before.

Will can feel his muscles working as he reels in what's sure to be a big one. He plants his feet firmly into the river silt and angles his rod up, winding the lever with quick, practiced motions. Out of the water emerges a beautiful, thirteen inch brook trout snagged on the bait Will had named Hannibal.

When they get back to the house, Will is three trout richer. Two will be for him and Hannibal, and he'll cook the third one up with brown rice and sweet potato for the dogs.

Will takes his waders off by the door outside and sets his rod up when he gets into the house. He is going to walk over to the fireplace that has yet to be repaired to light a fire when strong arms encircle his waist from behind, a hot mouth at his ear.

“I must have you,” Hannibal growls into his ear. He steps closer so that he’s flush against Will’s sweaty back and Will can feel the very clear line of his erection against his ass.

Shocked at the suddenness of it, it takes Will a second to realize that Hannibal is grinding himself against him.

Will gasps. “What’s brought this on?” Not that he’s complaining. His body is starting to react to his needy lover so close.

“Watching you. Your proficiency is enticing. I’ve been aroused since you cast your first line.”

The sound that leaves Will’s lips at that is something better suited to a wounded animal. “Fuck, Hannibal.” He reaches back to sink his fingers into Hannibal’s soft hair. “How do you want me?”

“Will the fish keep?”

“Fuck the fish.”

Another slow grind against his backside. “I’d rather fuck you.”

“Then fuck me.”

With strength Will shouldn’t be surprised by, Hannibal turns him around and hoists him up. Will instinctively wraps his legs around Hannibal’s solid waist, his arms around his neck. There is hardly any space left between their faces and not a second later, Hannibal has closed the rest of that distance with his mouth, hungrily moving against Will’s own as he walks them to Will’s bed.

“Forgive me,” Hannibal breathes, pulling away suddenly. Will whines in the back of his throat at the loss. “We don’t have to if you don’t want to.” He hasn’t put Will down. In fact, if anything, he only grips him tighter as he says the words.

“Does it look like I don’t want to?” Will pants.

“I shouldn’t presume. I should have asked.”

“If there is something I don’t want, trust me, I’ll let you know.” Will grinds his hips against Hannibal’s and does it again when he gets a soft groan in response.

Hannibal seems to take him at his word if the way he’s unceremoniously dropped on his bed is any indication. Will pulls off his sweater and undershirt and starts unbuttoning his pants as Hannibal does the same with hurried movements, fumbling at his own belt buckle. Will throws his pants off somewhere on the ground at the same time Hannibal drops his slacks, showing his white briefs, stretched obscenely over the girth of his erection. Hannibal had said

he's been aroused since watching Will cast his first line, and it shows in how damp his briefs are, translucent, showing the ridge of the head.

The younger man watches with a slack jaw as Hannibal slowly pulls them down, down, until his cock springs free, red and leaking. Will shoves his boxers down until they, too, end up somewhere else. He doesn't care where. Hannibal shows a similar and uncharacteristic carelessness with his own clothes as he slips everything else off.

Naked at last, Hannibal climbs onto the bed between Will's spread thighs and cages him in within his arms, leaning down for a scorching, wet kiss as he lowers his hips. Will gasps into his mouth at the feeling of him sliding along his own sex, nudging his cock and stroking his balls so perfectly, he could weep.

"How would you like me?" Hannibal asks huskily.

Will really wants him back inside, but isn't feeling patient enough to go through the preparation his ass would need to take the other man. "Like how we did it last time."

"Would you like to be on top again?"

Will shakes his head and brings his arms up to wrap around Hannibal's neck, holding him close. "No. Like this."

Hannibal sighs against his mouth and smiles something small and intimate. They kiss and grind against each other for an unknown stretch of time. On every other down thrust, the tip of Hannibal's cock catches against his front opening, making Will writhe against his gray sheets. The next time it happens, Will spreads his legs a little further and tilts his hips up. Hannibal slides inside with a smooth thrust of his hips. He works in small circles until he is all the way inside, and both men vocalize their pleasure at finally being conjoined once more.

Hannibal stays where he is, right in Will's personal space which is exactly where Will wants him so he can kiss across his face and lip at his mouth as they make love. Will moves his hands up and down Hannibal's sweaty back and down to his ass to encourage his thrusts, deep and slow and absolutely perfect.

Will was worried, okay, not *worried* per se, but he thought it would take many times of doing this before they could do it slow and sweet. They may have started off impatient, but as they look into each other's eyes, unable to look away, the momentum of their togetherness is unhurried, and Will feels something crack open inside of him.

The angle of their bodies allows for some friction along the length of Will's cock from Hannibal's tummy as they move together like they were born for only this, only with each other, like they've been doing this for years; Will lifting up to meet the slow drags of Hannibal's cock inside of him with the familiarity of old lovers. Hannibal, above him, is quietly trembling as he moves and Will can't seem to catch his breath.

"Will –"

“Tell me.” He sees Hannibal mentally pick through and discard words in the privacy of his own mind and leans up to nip at his bottom lip. “No. Tell me.”

“I can’t believe how good you feel. It’s never been like this.”

“For me, either,” Will reassures him. “It’s … you’re perfect.”

Hannibal huffs, thrusting particularly deep and making Will’s back arch. His sensitive nipples rub against the hair on Hannibal’s chest. “I’m far from perfect.”

Will is aware. “Perfect for me,” he says with feeling, taking a hand off Hannibal’s ass to suck his first and middle finger into his mouth. Hannibal watches him with hungry curiosity. Will slathers them with spit before he reaches down and, before he makes contact, asks, “Can I touch you here?”

“*Yes*.”

Hannibal doesn’t stop as Will parts Hannibal’s pert cheeks and reaches inside to where his hole awaits his touch. The first touch to the furled skin has Hannibal’s hips stuttering and leaves him gasping against Will’s mouth.

“Yeah?”

“Please,” Hannibal whimpers.

Will firms his touch and rubs against where Hannibal is tight and unyielding, his fingers soft and urging Hannibal to relax. His sphincter blooms like a flower under Will’s ministrations, his thrusts speeding up, his eyes screwed shut against the pleasure. He’s so beautiful like this that Will can hardly stand it.

“Will,” Hannibal places his head into the crook of Will’s neck and nuzzles into him. “I think. I want –”

“What do you want, baby?” Hannibal shudders. Will strokes the hand not playing with Hannibal’s ass across the broad expanse of his shoulders. “What is it?”

“No one has ever called me that before.”

“Do you like it?”

Hannibal hesitantly nods his head against Will’s neck, still thrusting. His movements are getting more uncoordinated the more Will strokes over his hole.

“Do you want me to call you that more often?” Will asks.

A second where he doesn’t feel Hannibal breathe, and then a small nod, once again, against his neck.

“Okay,” Will says simply, and kisses the top of his head. “Tell me what you want, baby.”

Hannibal takes a shuddering breath. “I want you inside me, Will.”

Will’s heart skips. He hasn’t fucked anyone in a long time, but he has all the necessary supplies. “Okay,” Will says again, kissing his cheek. “I’d love to. I just need to get a few things.”

Hannibal reluctantly pulls out, his hard cock thwapping up against his stomach as he does. They maneuver around until Hannibal is on his back, cock an angry red and leaking, twitching up to the sky on every other breath.

“I’ll be right back.”

Will goes to his dresser and gets his harness, dusting it off and slipping it on, and selects two different dildos that will each fit into it before returning with his bounty back to the bed. He holds up two realistic looking cocks, one long and slim and the other thick and a few inches shorter.

“How big would you like me to be?” Will asks huskily. He’s excited at the prospect of being able to do this with Hannibal, to Hannibal. He thought it would be something the other man would be uninterested in. Hearing that he’s not, hearing him ask for it, sets Will’s blood to flame.

Hannibal nods to the long and slim one, and Will straps it into his sleek black leather harness with efficient movements. Hannibal opens the drawer of his bedside table and fishes out the half empty bottle of lube, and tosses it onto the bed in Will’s general direction. He picks it up and knee-crawls over to where Hannibal has spread his legs as far as they will go, his beautiful feet planted on the mattress.

Will can’t help but to admire the view of his testicles, the hair that dusts across them and leads up to a wild bush of wiry blonde hair that frames his leaking cock. His hole is small and dusky pink. It twitches under Will’s gaze as if his eyes were providing a physical caress to the little bundle of flesh. Will licks his lips as an idea forms in his mind.

He wants to taste.

It’s not something he’s ever done before, but he’s, of course, heard of such an act. He doesn’t live under a rock despite the fact that he lives like a hermit. He looks up to meet Hannibal’s eyes, only to see them already watching him.

“I’d like to eat you out,” Will states bluntly. Hannibal tilts his hips up in invitation.

Will moans and gets a pillow to shove under Hannibal’s lifted hips and crawls closer on his hands and knees. He can already smell him from such a short distance, musky and slightly sweaty. He doesn’t know if Hannibal had showered before coming over, but he doesn’t care. He doesn’t fucking care. He didn’t know he could want something so bad, but he wants to do this with a fierceness that makes him shake.

He settles in between the wide spread of Hannibal legs. There’s slight friction from the dildo against his cock, but he ignores it for now.

The first touch of his tongue is shy, hesitant. The second touch is followed by a gasp at the taste, the feel of Hannibal's furled skin winking against his tongue. He's rich here, the salt of sweat and something piquant that he's never tasted before, clean skin and *Hannibal.*

He loses himself.

His mouth opens hungrily as he licks and sucks against him, mouthing at his hole as if he were truly eating him. It's the most intimate act Will has ever performed on another person and Hannibal is writhing under his tongue, vocalizing his pleasure loudly to whoever will hear it and completely uncaring. The older man hoists his own legs up from behind the crooks of his knees, spreading himself wide open and urging Will closer, deeper, *more.* The sight of it is unbearably hot, that the prim, proper doctor even knows how to contort his body like this and offer himself up for the taking with such wanton desire.

Will feasts himself on what Hannibal freely offers him with abandon, his tongue firm and undulating against his hole, sloppy with saliva, squelching with it in a way that has Will grinding himself onto the bed, needing relief. He feels so fucking good, tastes even better. This is not the last time Will is going to do this for Hannibal. He's going to think about it all the time. He's going to remember this always.

"Will, fuck," Hannibal pants into the air. "*Ah, ah, ah.*" Will's eyes roll back into his skull. The noises coming out of Hannibal's mouth … desperate, needy, whimpering little sighs and grunts. God it's getting him absolutely soaked.

He's rocking his hips now back onto Will's face with jerking hips. Will brings his hands up and sucks both of his own thumbs into his mouth to wet them and reluctantly pulls his reddened mouth away. Soft strokes with both thumbs to the rim of Hannibal's hole, and then he pushes the tips of both inside his unbelievable tightness, hot like a furnace and so, so soft.

He spreads his thumbs, gently, rubbing them soothingly when he meets resistance and hushing Hannibal calm when he starts to thrash. And then he puts his mouth back where it belongs and licks *inside.*

Hannibal *wails*.

Will doesn't relent. Licking deeper than he's ever licked into anything, his whole tongue submerged into the quivering depths of Hannibal's ass. The taste is so much richer, decadent to his senses. He makes his tongue into a sharp point and then curls it where it rests inside to flick along the inner walls of Hannibal's rectum.

Hannibal stills preternaturally except where his hands clumsily sink into Will's hair a little too hard, holding him there. As if Will would ever want to leave. Hannibal's thighs are quaking, his toes curled where they are visible to Will from the air because he refuses to shut his eyes for even a second to blink.

He flattens his tongue and seals his lips to Hannibal's rim with calculated motions. And when he's as deep as he can go between his cheeks, as close as he can ever be, Will uses the flat of his tongue and gives a firm lick to the roof of Hannibal's channel. The younger man continues his ministrations, repeating the firm licks, curling and uncurling his sore, tired

tongue to reach until he feels Hannibal's walls start to quiver around him. With great care, he releases his thumbs and sucks his tongue back into his mouth, giving Hannibal's winking hole one last filthy, open mouthed kiss.

When Will pulls himself back to Hannibal, the other man has his eyes screwed shut, tears leaking from the seams. His mouth is open, his lips bitten raw and bleeding in one spot. He looks beautiful. Will leans in to lick the blood away, but then thinks better of it. He just had his mouth on Hannibal's asshole, it wouldn't do to possibly infect the small wound.

He longs to kiss him though. Longs to reassure him and bring him back down to earth.

Hannibal's eyes open slowly as if he's seeing the world for the first time, full of wonder and love. Will smiles at him.

"I want to kiss you so bad," he says regretfully.

"Why don't you, then?" Hannibal is still panting, trying to catch his breath. "God, Will, you're … you are perfect. That was perfect."

Will can feel his face heat under the softly spoken praise. "Your mouth is bleeding, I don't want to make it worse."

"I will disinfect it when we're done," Hannibal says, and brings Will down to share his own flavor. The kiss starts off slow and measured, but seconds into it, Hannibal grows restless, licking into Will's mouth and humming at their combined flavors as he nips and suckles at Will's lips.

Hannibal's hips lift and grind against the cock he wears, putting pressure on his own sex. Will moans into his mouth. "You want me like this?" Will asks, grinding down.

"Just like this," Hannibal agrees breathlessly.

"Okay."

Will fumbles for the lube and, when he finds it, he smears a generous amount onto his first two fingers, reaching down between them to stroke over where his mouth was not moments before. Hannibal is still slightly open from the work of his mouth and thumbs, and he slips both fingers inside easily with a slick glide to the knuckle.

Hannibal keens when Will curls his fingers up, stroking along his walls until he finds what he's looking for. He pays special attention to the little nub as he scissors his fingers, Hannibal bucking his hips in tight little circles.

He feels ready. The cock Will wears is not especially thick, made more for anal penetration with its thinner design. But he needs to be sure. He doesn't want to hurt Hannibal, wants him only to feel pleasure.

"Think you're ready for me?"

“I’m ready.” Hannibal lowers his legs back towards the bed and wraps them around Will’s waist. “I’m ready, Will.”

His legs feel so good wrapped around his waist. All of this just feels so fucking perfect.

Will nods against Hannibal’s forehead and, not looking away, neither of them looking away, removes his lube-sticky fingers and smearing the copious amount onto his cock. He reaches down to feel where Hannibal is wet and open for him. It takes everything he has not to shake as he grasps his dick and leads it there, pushing inside when he finds it again. He pushes in carefully, going deeper with each thrust. Hannibal is moaning constantly beneath him, just as hungry for it as Will is, opening his legs a little more and shifting his hips to get Will deeper.

In total, the dick is about eight inches, well above what is considered average for the regular cisgender male, and made to reach deep. When he’s fully seated, his hips resting against Hannibal’s ass, he wonders what it feels like to be so deep inside Hannibal Lecter, inside the Chesapeake Ripper as he wrenches under him in desperate movements, panting wetly and unable to focus his eyes on any one thing. He can imagine, but it’s not the same.

It hardly matters right now, or at least, it shouldn’t. That he’s getting to do this at all is a privilege.

They move together, Will thrusting in and Hannibal thrusting up. Hannibal has wrapped every limb around him, his legs around Will’s waist and his arms around his neck, hands gripping his hair and squeezing intermittently in needy pulls. He’s overwhelmed, Will can tell. He tries to keep the motion of his own hips easy and slow as Hannibal acclimates, but it’s difficult to with how Hannibal is acting beneath him. He wants to fuck him hard and fast, really see the last of his composure shatter under his hands.

“Hold on tight,” Will says as he grasps Hannibal by his back and lifts him up onto his lap.

Hannibal grunts in surprise as he’s hefted up by deceptively strong arms, Will’s biceps bulging as he positions Hannibal how he likes him. Like this, Hannibal has nowhere to go. He is still wrapped tightly around Will, as unwilling to let go as Will is to let him. Will moves his own legs so that he is comfortably kneeling on the bed and gives a hesitant thrust, seating himself all the way inside and staying there.

Hannibal sobs. “So deep. *So deep.*”

“Are you okay?” Will asks, worried he went too far.

“I’ve transcended,” Hannibal utters breathlessly.

Will takes that as permission to begin moving again. He starts slow and easy, getting them both used to this position. Soon, they are grinding against each other like they’ll die if they don’t. Hannibal is all grasping hands and panting and whimpering breaths and Will is lost. He can’t look away as Hannibal falls apart on his lap. In the position he’s in, bouncing on Will’s cock is impossible. He can only hold on tight and take what Will gives him.

Will wants to reach down and stroke him off, but his hands are full. “Touch yourself. I want to watch.”

Hannibal releases the death grip he has on Will’s shoulders with one hand, quickly wrapping his other arm all the way around Will’s shoulders to hold himself steady and reaches down between them. His movements are hurried and desperate as he strokes himself off and Will watches, transfixed, as Hannibal’s foreskin moves with his hand, giving him teasing glimpses of the fat head of his cock before it disappears in his fist. He’s leaking an absurd amount all over himself and it smears against Will’s belly.

“C-close, Will. *Will. Ah, ah, ah*. Fuck, *Will.*”

And then he’s coming hard, cum roping up all over both of their bellies. Will, even with the cock he wears, can feel Hannibal clenching around him, trying to pull him in deeper as he spasms and falls apart in the safety of Will’s arms, moaning loudly into Will’s ear, nails digging into the skin of his back.

He comes for long moments. It takes him a while to come down from the intensity of what they just shared. Will holds him through it, strokes his back, kisses all over his face and tells him how good he is, how perfect he is. Hannibal melts under the praise, writhing with both the pleasure of being filled and the pleasure of his words.

Will is aching, but he wants to make sure Hannibal is okay first. If he doesn’t come, that’s just fine with him.

Hannibal opens his mouth, but no words come out. He tries again and then huffs in frustration when he can’t. Will kisses him silent, stilling his lips and silently reassuring him that it’s okay. They share soft kisses, little lippy things that have their lips sticking together.

Gently, Will shifts them so that Hannibal is laying back down and gingerly pulls out with a slick pop. Hannibal winces as he slides out. Will quickly takes off his harness and sets everything aside to be washed later and lays his body on top of Hannibal’s, holding him close and nuzzling into his neck.

“You didn’t get to finish,” Hannibal says softly. He looks … displeased, which is the last thing Will wants him to be feeling right now.

“Don’t you worry about me,” Will says, stroking his cheek. He leans down and kisses him. “I’m good. That was amazing, Hannibal. Getting to do that with you, letting me see you like that. It’s more than I could have ever asked for.” He means it, too.

Hannibal’s eyes open and focus immediately on Will’s. “And yet I want you to. I love seeing you lost to your pleasure, knowing it’s me giving it to you.”

Will ponders this. “Turn around for me. Keep your legs together.”

Hannibal obeys him without fuss, turning over to rest on his stomach and keeping his legs together as asked of him. Will straddles his thighs. With gentle hands he kneads Hannibal’s ass, massaging him for a stretch of time before parting his cheeks. Hannibal has yet to ask

what Will plans to do. He seems to trust he won't do anything that would be too much for his sore, used hole to handle, and Will trusts that Hannibal would say something if he did.

Will scoots up until his crotch is resting against Hannibal's cleft and then scoots a little closer. With Hannibal parted and open for him, Will has all the room he needs to rub himself along where the older man is still wet and loose.

Both men groan at the contact. Will is hard as a rock, throbbing with lack of attention. In this state, he's thicker and a bit longer than he is soft, and as such, he is able to penetrate the outer ring of Hannibal's anus. The feeling is indescribable.

It's not like how a cis man would fuck him, but it's what Will has, and if the sounds Hannibal is making are anything to go by it, he's enjoying this particular act. Will grinds himself into Hannibal's hole at a quick, unrelenting pace, completely different to how he'd fucked him with the dick.

"God, Hannibal," he groans. "So good. You're so tight."

"Call me it again, Will. Please."

Begging for praise, begging for endearments. He's perfect like this. So perfect.

Utter filth conjures itself in Will's mind and spills out of his mouth. "Such a sweet little ass, baby. All mine," he huffs wetly onto the skin of Hannibal's nape. "All fucking mine."

"Yes, Will. Yours. Yours."

He's close already from fucking Hannibal before. He had been so beautiful writhing and vocalizing on Will's lap, soaking his abdomen with how much he was leaking.

He's beautiful now. Back muscles flexing under his tanned skin in an effort to move against Will, scapulae bulging, hair sweaty and messy and sticking up at odd angles.

He's too close to hold on for much longer and with a shout he's coming, his little cock throbbing with each spasm, his holes clenching tight around nothing as he rides it out. Sweat drips down his chest and back. The room stinks of sex and he hopes it always stays. He may never wash these sheets again.

Will keeps grinding in, lost to the aftershocks of his pleasure, but he makes himself stop when he hears Hannibal whine.

"Will," Hannibal whimpers, legs shaking. "Sensitive."

Will kisses his neck and pulls his hips away, panting against Hannibal's skin in heaving gasps. Hannibal turns over underneath him, staring up at him like he's seeing the sun for the first time. Will smiles down at him and kisses him, soft and sweet, resting the whole of his body weight on top of him.

They rest like that for a while, having nothing else to do and nothing they'd rather be doing. An hour later they finally rise from the warm cocoon of Will's bed to shower, washing each

other with reverent touches, smiling shyly at each other throughout. They retire back to bed where they spend the rest of the day when the hot water runs out; talking, touching, enjoying each other.

Will hates that it'll likely be a week before he sees Hannibal next, hates even more that it'll be for a dinner party where he will hardly have Hannibal's undivided attention as he tends to his other guests, but he tries to push those thoughts out of his mind for another time. He can worry about all of that when he doesn't have six feet of nuzzling cannibal pressed against him.

He has him here now, and he intends to make the most of it.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Will asks Bev for help. Alana pops in for a visit.

Chapter Notes

I just wanted to thank everyone for the love I've gotten for this story. Your comments never fail to bring a smile to my face and I couldn't have done this without the support of my fellow readers.

This chapter is pretty dialogue heavy, just a heads up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They had spent hours in bed wasting the day away, though Will wouldn't consider it a waste at all. They had cuddled, had obscene amounts of sex, and talked. Topics ranged from everything to nothing, big things and small things. As they talked, they touched and as they touched, they blurred.

Will thinks back to a previous conversation they had earlier about having this easy domesticity always. It should have scared him. They've been official for a whole three days, had their first date just yesterday in which they exchanged three little words that are, typically, very atypical first date proclamations.

But, Will reminds himself, they've been doing this dance of stolen glances and not-so-casual touches for a while now. Months. They've been getting to know each other, falling in love for what feels like forever. Maybe fear has no place in this. Even if it did, even if it should, considering what Hannibal does in his free time, Will can't summon it. This feels more right than anything he's ever had and for once in his miserable life, he wants to be selfish.

Words bubble up Will's throat as he watches Hannibal dress. Now would be a good time to tell him – tell him that he knows, tell him that while he's not thrilled about it, he accepts it for what it is – but when Will opens his mouth, only a stilted breath comes out. What if Hannibal runs? What if Hannibal kills him? What if Hannibal leaves the country, never to be found again? The very reality of any of these options stills Will's tongue.

To lose him is unfathomable and Will very much would like to keep breathing, if it's all the same.

He tries to imagine an outcome that isn't violent or heartbreaking, but his traitorous mind only supplies him worse case scenarios. He doesn't want any of them.

He wants this: quiet days in and shared glances full of adoration and longing, nights spent so wrapped up in each other that they can't tell where one ends and the other begins. He wants hoity-toity lunch in his office out of fancy glass containers and dinners where he helps Hannibal prepare their meal.

He wants this life with him, and he'll have it or nothing at all.

He stays quiet as Hannibal dons his sweater, buttons up his slacks and buckles his belt. Will catches a glimpse of his cute little tummy and melts. No. He can't lose him. He won't.

Will had been decided back when he still wasn't sure – that he would protect Hannibal. He is even more sure now. There will have to be a conversation between them if Will is going to successfully lead the investigation away from Hannibal. The good doctor wasn't on Jack's radar at the moment, but that doesn't mean he won't make a mistake one day, or that Jack won't come to the same conclusion that Will did based off of his well accepted profile. He would need to rework it slowly, bit by bit, to fit someone else, someone nameless and similar enough to what he'd come up with for it to be believable, but too different to be confused.

Frederick Chilton comes to mind, the smarmy bastard. Always trying to get under Will's skin, under the protective barrier of his skull so he could dig his grubby fingers around Will's brain. He would make a good patsy. Surgeon turned psychiatrist, consulted on Ripper cases, theatrical and over-embellished and arrogant. It was something to keep in mind.

"You're awfully quiet," Hannibal intones softly as he's sitting on Will's bed pulling on his shoes.

"Already missing you," Will replies. It's not a lie.

Hannibal finishes tying his shoes and turns to Will, looking at him fondly. There's a hint of something in his eyes that makes Will feel better, a similar longing. "I will try to see you as soon as I can, but I would feel horribly if I made you a promise I couldn't keep."

"I know," Will says softly. He pushes the covers off his naked body and goes up to Hannibal where he's sitting on the bed and wraps himself around the other man's back. "Maybe a few phone calls if we can't see each other."

"I would adore that." Hannibal turns around so that Will is now flush against his side, and Hannibal turns his head for a languid kiss, soft and sweet. "I will miss you as well." He says it overly formal, his tone almost angular. Will feels his heart go soft at seeing his awkward attempt at emotionalism.

Will smiles at him. His heart feels heavy, but he'll see him soon enough, at the very least, Will will just be annoying and call him every night.

"Let me put some clothes on and I'll walk you out."

“Alright.”

Will picks up his clothes from off the floor that he had been wearing earlier that day and steps into his shoes as Hannibal packs the rest of his things. It’s late and he hopes Hannibal will be able to sleep enough before his early start to the day tomorrow.

He decides to ask. “I hope I didn’t keep you too late.”

Hannibal zips up his bag and says, “Not at all, Will. I require little rest. A holdover from my days as an emergency room surgeon, perhaps.”

“Yeah, I bet,” Will agrees. He’s sure that little tidbit comes in handy as an active serial killer with a full time practice, but he keeps that thought to himself.

An image comes to mind of Hannibal in a doctor’s coat and scrubs. He adds it to his mental list of things that need to be revisited at a later time with a flush to his face.

Another image comes to mind unbidden, one that’s less savory. Flashes of himself in a shabby suit surrounded by Hannibal’s uppity friends. The flush to his cheeks turns from lust to shame.

“Do you trust me to dress myself for your dinner party?” Will asks suddenly.

Hannibal glances at him from where he was saying actual *goodbyes* to his dogs as if they were people. “I do.”

“You’ve seen my suit,” Will laments, thinking of the plain, baggy, black ensemble and plain white oxford shirt. The image doesn’t match with someone Hannibal would willingly be seen with. A strange feeling, a buzzing under his skin, takes over Will’s nervous system. The last thing he wants to be is an embarrassment.

“I have. If that is what you wish to wear, then wear it.” Hannibal sets his bag down by the door and walks over to Will, holding his arms out. Will steps into them as if pulled by gravitational force. It would make sense. Hannibal is his sun. “Whatever you wear, I will always find you beautiful.”

“I don’t want to embarrass you.”

“Will.” Hannibal very nearly sounds exasperated. “You will not, under any circumstances, no matter what. I care very little for what these people think of me, and I imagine the sentiment is returned. They will come because of the social benefits and stay for the free food and drink. They will come for Count Hannibal Lecter VIII, not for me. If they happen to disapprove of you, I will simply escort them out.”

“You’d end up escorting everyone out,” Will grumbles into Hannibal’s neck. He feels Hannibal sigh.

“Then I will escort everyone out. It makes no difference to me.” Hannibal pulls away slightly so he can peer at Will under the fan of his blonde eyelashes. “What is it we said? With every touch we are remade, and with every new thought, we are reshaped?”

Will sighs. Holds him tighter. Hannibal continues as he strokes Will's hair, "Empty soirees no longer hold their appeal for me. I've discovered what a true connection feels like, Will. With you. I have found it to be preferable to what I am used to."

"You've changed a lot," Will remarks softly, almost disbelieving, suspicious. He hates that he gets this way, that he needs the reassurance.

"So I have," Hannibal agrees. "If I may make my own observation, you seem to have a very low opinion of yourself." He leans back out of their hug to stroke along Will's stubbled cheek. His gaze is serious, if not a little sad. "It's unnecessary. If you could see yourself the way I see you, you would see that there is absolutely nothing you should fear."

Will blinks. That sounded heavier than what the conversation called for. Will's mind buzzes. *They should be the ones fearing you* floats unspoken in the air between them.

"Maybe," is all he can think to say to that. "C'mon, I'll walk you out."

Will tries to gather himself enough to step fully out of their embrace, but Hannibal stills him by placing each of his hands on Will's arms. "I mean it, Will. Whatever you choose to wear, I will sit you proudly at my table. I will parade you around the room, showing you off as you deserve to be, and I will be nothing less than utterly transfixed by you as I do."

Fuck, and he means it, too. Will swallows, unable to look away from the force of Hannibal's amber eyes. It doesn't take a genius to see how lovestruck Hannibal is – it's all there to see, unhidden and not meant to be. His eyes are quietly furious that Will feels this way about himself, and showing *so much* as they travel between Will's own.

Will is still having a hard time understanding what this man wants with him. He has no idea what there is about a transman from the swamp who wears cheap clothes and surrounds himself with dogs could possibly do to draw in and keep a man like Hannibal; refined, outwardly perfect, undeniably dangerous.

"I'm not a trophy wife," Will says petulantly.

"No, but you are a prize."

"I'm not something to be won."

"Then why do I feel as if I have?"

Fuck. This man is going to kill him with his pretty words. He hopes they aren't just that, but he can feel that they're not.

Will sighs. His brain hurts and his face is hot and he's done with this conversation. "Let me walk you out," he repeats quietly, leaning in to kiss Hannibal's cheek. Hannibal turns his head for a proper kiss.

"I love you, Will." Will nods and opens his mouth to say it back, but Hannibal stops him with another kiss. There's something determined in his eyes, something resigned. "You are the last

person I will ever say that to," he says gravely. "To you, I give the key. To lock me up or set me free."

Will knows there's something he's saying without saying, knows that Hannibal knows that one day Will is going to figure him out, unknowing that Will already has. He's basically giving Will permission to do with the information what he will.

He doesn't know that Will plans to keep him.

Will takes Hannibal's hands in his and kisses each one. The words he wants to say are stuck in his throat after such an ardent onslaught, but he wants to show the other man that he hears him, and returns his feelings. Hannibal, judging by how his eyes soften with a smile, hears him.

The night is not young anymore, and they have responsibilities to attend in the morning and Hannibal has a long drive. With another sigh, Will tugs Hannibal towards his front door.

Hand in hand, fingers intertwined, Will walks Hannibal to his Bentley and opens the door for him with slow movements, reluctant to let him go now that he's truly leaving. Hannibal places his bag in the passenger seat and turns back to Will for a kiss. Will knows he needs to let Hannibal go, but instead of keeping the kiss casual, he deepens it, pushing Hannibal against the side of his car with a rough shove and licking his way into the older man's mouth hungrily. Hannibal grunts as his back hits the car and responds in kind, winding one hand through Will's curls to keep him where he wants him and the other around his waist to pull him even closer.

"The things you do to me," Hannibal whispers against his open mouth. Will presses one last kiss to those plush red lips and pulls away.

The moon is but a crescent tonight, providing little in way of light. Will knows he needs to let Hannibal go. He'd hate to seem clingy even though he thinks Hannibal would like it. With a sigh, Will pulls away.

"Goodnight, Hannibal."

"I'll text you when I arrive home," He says, kissing Will's forehead before getting into his car. Will nods and closes the door for him before he can beg Hannibal to stay. He steps back a few feet and watches as Hannibal pulls out of his long, gravel driveway before he turns off and leaves down the two lane road leading away from him and goes back inside.

Will sits on his couch, Max and Ellie to his left, Winston and Zoe to his right. Jack, Harley, and Buster are by his feet on the floor. Will sips slowly on his tumbler of whiskey as he stares at his phone.

Hannibal had just texted him that he made it home safe. Which was great. But now Will didn't know if he should say anything other than the simple *good* he had sent back. He turns his phone on and off, debating sending a double text. He doubts Hannibal would mind it.

Goodnight he types, but it feels lackluster.

He has never been very good at this. He debates adding a pet name, wondering which Hannibal would cringe at the least.

He remembers fondly a little old woman he had helped out on occasion back in Louisiana when he was a kid for some extra cash. She had been sweet to him, perhaps the only friend he had for the short year he and his father lived in Baton Rouge. She always called him *cher*.

It never failed to make Will feel like he belonged, a bloom of affection he had sorely needed in his young heart, absent from his own parents. A mother who left and a father who might as well have.

He wants Hannibal to feel that affection, that belonging. He wants, specifically, for Hannibal to feel that belonging to *Will.*

With sweaty fingers, he types.

Goodnight, cher.

Not a few seconds later, yet still long enough for him to worry, his screen lights up.

Goodnight, beloved.

Will lets out a small breath of relief and smiles at his phone, feeling incredibly warm. He decides not to keep the conversation going. Hannibal has appointments and murder to keep if he's to have enough food for his dinner party, and Will has lectures starting at nine.

Lonely, he calls all the dogs to his bed after putting his glass in the sink to be washed later. They come at the first sound of his whistle and crowd on the bed, all seven. Will strips down to his boxers and tee shirt and slips between the gray cotton sheets, setting his alarm and pulling the covers up to his chin to ward off the cold.

His dogs warm the bed almost instantly, and he feels less alone as they settle in around him. Zoe comes up to her usual spot when he allows them on his bed, right next to his pillow, looking at him with her cute little underbite. Will sighs affectionately and opens up the blankets for her to crawl under them.

He falls asleep the moment his head hits the pillow, and he dreams of crooked teeth and brown eyes shining red in the sun.

A knock at his open office door. “You rang?”

Will looks up from where he was grading papers and sees Bev come in and plop herself down in one of the plastic chairs on the other side of his desk. She also plops down a hot cup of coffee, which Will takes gratefully.

It tastes like shit, but it’s hot, and it’s caffeinated. “I need your help,” he says with a put upon sigh. He’s dreading what he’s about to ask, but he can’t think of anyone else suitable for the task.

She arches an eyebrow, intrigued. “Oh?”

“Yeah,” Will sucks his lips between his teeth and puts his pen down, clacking it against the desk a few times before tossing it on the desk. “I um. I need to buy an outfit. For something.”

Her eyes widen. “Are you asking me to go shopping with you?”

Will gives her his best blank face. “I’m asking you to go shopping with me,” he confirms.

Bev smiles and crosses her arms over her chest. “Fine. But you gotta tell me what for.”

Well. She already knows anyway. “Hannibal is throwing a dinner party, and I don’t want to look … I want to look presentable.”

She smirks. “Hannibal now, huh? Guess it’s serious.” He doesn’t deign to respond except to continue staring at her blankly. “Fine, fine. Where would you like to go?”

“... Sears?”

“No.”

“Target?”

“Will.”

“Fine. I don’t know. I don’t want to go to the mall.”

“We’re going to the mall.”

“Fine.”

“Fine.”

Their staring contest continues for a solid minute before Bev breaks first with a wry chuckle. “I’ll find you something nice to wear, don’t you worry. What kind of look are we going for?”

Will shrugs. “Hannibal said I could wear whatever I want.”

Bev hums. “That sounds like when a girl says she’s ‘fine.’”

Will chuckles wryly. “No, he was serious. He said … he told me no matter what I wore, he’d be proud to seat me at his table,” Will recalls with a light flush to his cheeks. The words still ring in his ears, followed by the words preceding and following such a proclamation. The man seriously had no chill and, judging by the surprised look on his friend’s face, she was starting to get that.

“Oh. Damn.”

“Yeah.”

“He’s got it bad for you,” she says gently. “Is it mutual?”

Will chortles self deprecatingly. “Pretty bad. It scares me, honestly. I … I want to look nice. Not too nice, I still want to look like me, but I want his jaw to drop.” Like it did when Will showed up in a simple sweater and jeans for their first date.

He supposes, when it comes to him at least, that Hannibal isn’t too difficult to impress. It makes Will feel warmer inside than perhaps it should.

Bev nods sagely, bringing her chin to rest in her hands as ideas flit through her mind. Will can see as she rummages through mental visuals of what he should wear and then subsequently discards them. He wonders if it’s because she doesn’t think he’s good enough for fine clothes, but then realizes he’s projecting.

She seems to be taking this seriously. Which is saying something since she rarely takes anything except dead bodies and Jack Crawford seriously. “Okay. So we pick clothes that you like and make your bubble butt pop out –”

“ – *Bev* –”

“ – and maybe buy some hair product. Doesn’t sound too difficult.” She tilts her head curiously. “You sure you need my help for this?”

Will isn’t sure, but he reached out to Bev for a reason. The idea of non judgmental feedback and some support while he panicked over an outfit was an appealing one, and Beverly was the only person he trusted to actually help him with this.

It’s not that he didn’t trust Hannibal, but he *trusted* Hannibal would drop a few grand to dress him up. That’s not what he wants. He wants to be himself. Stuffed into a suit consisting of three different patterns and/or colors that cost more than the down payment on his car did not fit in with that goal.

Something inside of him is putting its foot down, adamantly urging him to be himself. He thinks part of it is that he’s trying to test the older man, to see if he really will take Will as he is. The worst thing that can happen is that he won’t.

Beverly looks at him thoughtfully. “Stand up,” she commands him bossily. Will rolls his eyes but stands, holding his arms awkwardly by his sides. “Do a slow 360 for me,” she says, twirling her finger in the air to demonstrate.

Will sighs. “Is this really necessary?”

“It is, actually.”

“Fine.”

“Fine.”

Always has to have the last word. He grumbles under his breath and does a slow 360 like he was asked to do, raising his arms out a little for an extra sarcastic flair and topping it off with a withering stare when he finally is face to face again with his so-called friend. Bev just smirks.

“So. I’m thinking a slim fit turtleneck to show off that chest and accentuate your neck topped with a solid color sports coat. For the bottoms, are you a bottom?” Will rolls his eyes, blushing at the crass question. “I’m thinking slacks. Not chinos. Not jeans. Slacks. Tapered fit so they’re not baggy around your ankles since your thighs are so thick –”

“ - They’re normal! - ”

“ – and maybe a pair of Chelsea boots? I think oxfords would be a little bland. Every man needs a nice pair of Chelsea boots.”

Aside from the unnecessary comments, Will allows the visual of the picture Bev paints to enter his vivid mind. Suave, polished, but not over-the-top. Will isn’t a huge fan of turtlenecks, but the alternative is a sports coat which will make him feel like a plain, ordinary teacher surrounded by white collar money. Not having to wear a tie also sounds nice.

It’s an outfit Will can picture himself wearing and not hating. It seems he was right to trust Bev with the task.

“Okay,” Will agrees slowly. “That sounds surprisingly tame compared to what I thought you’d come up with.”

“You’ve seen what I wear to court,” she retorts. “Nice but understated is my jam. We’ll find you some colors you like. I was thinking a dark gray turtleneck to bring out your eyes and black for the coat and slacks.”

“That wouldn’t be too much black?”

“Nah. It would give you a mysterious vibe. Do you have cufflinks?”

Will thinks about the chipped silver ones he has and winces internally. “No.”

“Gold ones would look good. Both with your skin tone and the black.”

“Gold is kind of … pricey.”

“Not if they’re fake.”

“Fine. Just nothing jeweled.”

“No jewels. That wouldn’t fit your style, anyways.”

“Agreed.”

Will sits back down and takes another sip of his bitter, black coffee. Just the way he likes it. “Thanks for this, by the way,” he mumbles, looking at the stack of papers on his desk instead of at her.

“For the crappy coffee or helping you dress yourself?”

Will huffs. “Both.”

Bev’s face softens from her usual perpetual Cheshire smirk. “Hey. I’m happy to help. You know that.”

Will nods, still looking down, biting at his lips. It feels weird to receive help, it feels weird to know that she cares. Will is so used to people brushing him off and he’s usually fine with that, he accepts that it’s people’s knee-jerk reaction to avoid him. He briefly ponders the idea of letting his mask fall, just a little, around her, but quickly throws the idea aside. She’s gracious and friendly with this version of Will. He doesn’t know that anyone but Hannibal could accept him as he truly is.

Even Jack is wary of him. Price and Zeller hardly want to be alone in the room with him. Beverly accepts what he has no choice but to show, but he doubts that acceptance would go further. He doesn’t want to risk it.

“Well. Thank you,” he says awkwardly. “When are you free? The party is this Saturday.”

“We can go today, provided a body doesn’t drop?”

Will nods. “Okay. My last lecture ends at four thirty.”

“Then I’ll meet you there at five.”

“Fine.”

“Fine.”

Despite the air of indifference he knows he exudes to his students, Will actually enjoys teaching. When he’s at the front of his lecture hall, he commands the room. His students hang on his every word. He can feel that every time they raise their hand to add their thoughts or answer a question, they’re trying to impress him and their fellow classmates. It’s an energizing experience most days, the days where he gets enough sleep the night before.

He takes pride in his job, in forming these eager minds and helping them reach their potential. Being denied a position with the FBI had been a huge blow to his own fractured aspirations, but he knows that this is better for him. What he does for Jack is already too much to handle most days. It's not good for him, but he is good for it.

He's good for this too, though.

As he hears the distant clicking of heels on tiled floors, he glances up to see a cascade of dark curls and a flash of red. He stills. Automatically, he tugs out his glasses from the front pocket of his tweed coat and puts them on.

Alana Bloom strides towards his open door – purposefully familiar in her steps.

He's meant to be leaving soon to meet Beverly at Potomac Mills for their shopping excursion, and he'd hate to be late when she's been nice enough to take time out of her day to help him out, but it looks like he's going to be. Alana never puts herself in a room alone with him unless she has a reason to.

Alana strides up to him and he can remember why he had thought to kiss her all those months ago. She's pleasantly normal, beautiful, and kind – even if her kindness is tinged with mild condescension. She had been a rock during a time of crisis, but that rock had been less steady than he had thought it was and it had consequently been swept away by the current of Will's madness. He doesn't lament the loss, doesn't consider it a loss at all, considering what he's gained.

Curiosity wins over the urge to flee, but barely.

"Dr. Bloom," he says casually, stuffing a stack of essays into his messenger bag and unplugging his laptop from the projector.

Alana shoots him a playfully questioning glance. "Professor Graham," she responds with mock formality. She looks around his lecture hall with feigned interest before turning her ice blue gaze back to him. "Are we no longer on a first name basis, Will?" she asks, searching his face.

The earnestness in her voice makes Will mentally step back. "No. No, of course we are. Alana."

It's awkwardly quiet for a few moments while they stare at each other. Well, Alana stares at him. He's staring off somewhere into the room over the rim of his glasses. Something invisible prickles along Will's skin. An unspoken question hangs in the air.

"What brings you by?" he asks as politely as possible, closing his bag.

"I wanted to talk to you about something," she says. "Hannibal told me he invited you to his dinner party this weekend."

Ah. So that's what this is about. Will fights the urge to make his excuses and leave.

“Oh. Yeah,” is all he offers, shouldering his bag and cocking his hip to rest against his podium. He places his hands in his pockets instead of crossing them protectively over his chest and finally meets her gaze through the safety of his glasses.

She waits for him to offer more, but he doesn’t feel the need to elaborate. “Do you think that’s a good idea?” she asks. Her voice is soft as if she were talking to a patient, the way she always talks to Will. It grates on his nerves.

“Why wouldn’t it be? I’ll just be keeping the wall company.”

She shrugs politely. Everything about her is polite. Just like Hannibal. They would be good together, he thinks bitterly. Both polished and well dressed and well spoken; both beautiful. He glances down.

“He’s your therapist, Will.”

“He’s no more my therapist than you ever were,” he says exasperatedly. “He cleared me for field work months ago and that was the extent of our doctor-patient relationship, if it can even be called that.”

Her brow goes up a fraction. “I was under the impression you were seeing him once a week for sessions. That indicates a doctor-patient relationship.”

“The *extent* of our relationship violates HIPPA laws. Jack can get his hands on anything me and Hannibal talk about – so he can sleep better at night – which makes a doctor-patient relationship between Hannibal and I null and void. We have conversations, that’s all.”

Will is very careful about his word choice. *Conversations* indicates that it’s not one-sided, and he hopes she catches onto that without him having to say it. The things he and Hannibal talk about are important to him, and he doesn’t want to share that with anyone else.

Her eyes search his, looking for something, but Will isn’t sure what. He doesn’t see what the issue is. So what, Hannibal invited him. Is Will un-invitable? He tries not to be offended, but it doesn’t work well enough for it not to bleed through his tone.

“Is there a problem?”

Alana licks her lips. Her lipstick doesn’t smudge. “He’s still in a position of power over you, therapist or not. You go to his office, you’re the one who talks, he’s the one who listens. It’s inappropriate that he invited you, and I think it would be a bad idea for you to go.”

So much for her catching on. Will sucks his lips between his teeth and thinks about the beer Hannibal had brewed special for Alana, thinks about the plans he had had for her as a coverup, and feels the prickles on his skin disappear as he identifies the sensation for what it is. The need to stake claim.

“What did Hannibal say?” Will asks, deliberately using his first name. “I assume you told him the same thing you’re telling me.”

“I did, more or less,” she admits, tossing her hair over her shoulder and sitting down in one of the padded lecture hall chairs. “He told me you were never officially his patient and that socializing with you crosses no ethical boundaries.”

“You disagree?”

“I think I wanted your take on the situation. Do you feel like he’s taking advantage of you? Pressuring you?”

Will blinks at the question. Now he’s not only offended on his own behalf, but now also Hannibal’s. “No, of course not.” This is starting to feel suspiciously like Alana doesn’t trust him to think and make decisions for himself. “It’s not like that.”

She sets her purse down and crosses her legs. “How do you know?”

Will balks. What is that even supposed to mean? “Because I know,” he says with surety. “Look, Alana, I know I gave everyone cause for concern when I was sick, but I’m not sick anymore. I know who I am, I know what I want, I know what I’m doing, and I know what’s going on. I would appreciate it if you respected that I have some agency over my own life.”

“I’m not trying to question your agency.”

Will nearly rolls his eyes. “You wanted to make sure I knew what was going on, not if I was okay with what’s going on. That was just a polite way for you to bring it up without outright making assumptions.”

If Alana is taken aback by his blunt statement, she hides it well. “Why can’t it be both?” she asks.

“Because I don’t need either. I don’t need you to give me a reality check and I don’t need you looking out for me. I’m good now. Hannibal caught it, and got me the help I needed, and I’m good. Better than good. I feel better than I have in a long time.”

“Friends look out for each other, Will. You’re my friend.”

Will takes his glasses off and sets them on the podium with a soft thunk. He opens his mouth, but he’s unsure of what to say, so he closes it. He takes a deep, steadying breath, but it does nothing for his teeming emotions. He feels like he’s being treated like a child and he doesn’t like it, hates that she won’t take him seriously.

Maybe he’s overreacting. Maybe she really is just concerned, but she wouldn’t have these concerns with Hannibal. She would trust him to make his own choices and know the reality of the situation. That she doesn’t with Will irritates him.

He tries to keep his tone pleasant regardless. “I appreciate that you’re concerned, but please don’t be,” he finally says. “He’s not my therapist, I don’t feel taken advantage of, and I’m going to the party. He invited me, and he’s my friend. What, you think he invited me out of pity?”

“I think he invited you to be polite.”

“Why would he invite me and not Bev or Jimmy if that’s the case? He works with them too,” Will points out.

“He doesn’t have weekly, hour-long conversations with them.”

He’s starting to get frustrated. “I would have had no way of even knowing about the party, therefore, he wouldn’t have felt the need to invite me,” he points out testily.

“And if you caught wind of it?”

“We don’t run the same circles. I wouldn’t have.”

“You have me in the same circle, as well as Jack. Hannibal likely feels obligated to invite you, Will. I just wanted you to be sure this is what you want.”

Alright. Enough is enough. “Alana, Hannibal and I are together.”

Silence.

It was fortuitous that Jack would have found out at the party, where he couldn’t have reacted badly for fear of making a scene, but the direction their conversation is going makes him feel like he has no other choice but to come out with it. He hates it, hates that he has to defend himself against something as stupid and simple as a dinner party invitation.

Alana’s jaw drops slightly, not enough to be uncouth, but enough to let Will know that she’s adequately surprised by this revelation. He twitches his fingers nervously in his pockets.

She stands up. Something strange passes over her face. Jealousy, Will thinks. “Will, you can’t.”

He barely resists the urge to throw his hands up in the air. “Why not? You’ve heard it from both of us that no ethical boundaries are being crossed. We’re both fully consenting adults.” He rubs a hand over the back of his neck. This is going nowhere. “I know what I’m doing,” he repeats. He shouldn’t have to. This conversation shouldn’t be happening.

He looks down at his watch. Four forty. He really needs to go, and should probably text Bev and let her know that he’s been held up with work stuff. He’s not sure how comfortable he is sharing the real reason he’s running behind.

Alana sighs and looks away, but otherwise doesn’t respond. She bends down to grab her purse and slings it over her shoulder. “Does Jack know?”

“He will this weekend.”

She pauses and looks at Will with beseeching eyes. “I still think this is a bad idea, Will.”

“Noted.”

As she’s turning to walk away, she stops again and turns back around. There is something in her eyes, something vulnerable, and Will has the distinct feeling he isn't going to like what

she's about to say. “Not two weeks ago," Alana says, "he was bringing me lunch to my office." Will blinks. "We talked almost every day. He brews beer for me because when I go to his house, which is often, he knows I prefer it to wine.”

Will sees red, but tries to blink through it. Slow drips of hot jealousy drip down his spine. He licks his lips to keep from saying anything mean. “Why are you telling me this?” he asks, not looking at her, but at the patterned carpet beneath his worn boots.

She sighs and flicks her gaze to the empty projection screen. “Because until very recently, I thought *I* was dating Hannibal. Or, at least, going to be. He still sends me a text almost every morning to wish me a good day. You think he does that with all of his friends, Will? Does he do that with you?”

He doesn’t.

I ended that particular course when I realized how I felt about you.

My relationship with Dr. Bloom will remain professional, as it has been.

I always keep my promises.

Hannibal had told him, as they lay naked in bed together, that he had stopped once he figured out his feelings for Will. After Budge, before Will got treatment for the encephalitis. That was months ago.

He had promised.

Rage sits ugly and hot in his chest.

Will clenches his fists in his pockets and tries not to let it show how much this information bothers him.

“You think I’m imagining it,” Will realizes with a stab of bewilderment.

“I think you’re reading into something that isn’t there. Like perhaps I was.”

Will lets out a disbelieving laugh. “Alana, I think I would know if I was in a relationship. Me and Hannibal are together, end of story. I know what I’m doing, and so does he. I don’t really know what else to say,” Will says, because anything he would say right now would be severely unkind. He wants to ask why exactly Alana thought she needed to tell him this, but refrains. He doesn’t know that he could handle the answer right now.

“It’s okay for there to be nothing else to say,” she responds gently, sniffing. “I’ll admit, I’m a little thrown back, but you’re right. You and Hannibal are adults and this isn’t my business. I just thought you should know.” And with that, she turns around once more and leaves.

Will glares at her as she walks away, but lowers his eyes as she disappears around the corner. He glances at his watch. 4:43. He’s going to be late.

Will needs to rush out, but he loathes the idea of seeing anyone in the mood he's in, so he gives himself five minutes to breathe, counting his breaths and noticing how deep they go into his lungs. When he feels calm enough not to yell at the first person that looks at him, he leaves for his car, shooting Bev a text that he will be there soon and apologizing.

On the drive to the mall, which he is already not looking forward to, his and Alana's conversation sits like sour milk in his belly.

We talked almost every day.

I promise you that, and I always keep my promises.

He picks a parking spot once he gets there and throws his car in park with more force that is strictly necessary. He reads the text from Bev saying no worries, but there is also another text he reads and rereads as he sits in the mall parking lot, still fuming.

Hannibal is asking him if he would like to come over early Saturday so they can have some time alone together before the party.

I think you're reading into something that isn't there. Like perhaps I was.

Will clicks his phone off and doesn't respond, heading out into the cold November air with his heart in his stomach.

Chapter End Notes

Uh-oh. Hannibal is in trouble, y'all. Send help.

Next chapter will be out pretty soon I think. I'm nearly done with it and I'm actually really excited to post it. I love conflict lol.

I also just want to talk real quick about characterization. I didn't add the tag "OOC" because, in my mind, I'm not really writing these characters out of character. We all interpret media differently and this is my interpretation (with some embellishment). Will, in the show, shows a heavy aptitude for jealousy from my perspective, and Hannibal shows a compassion for Will that he doesn't show others unless it's for personal gain. I'm not under the impression that Hannibal is a good person, or even an okay person, but I think there are sides to everyone and these are the sides I want to write about in this fic.

Regardless, I hope you are still enjoying it! Thank you for listening to my rant. Carry on.

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

A very necessary conversation is had.

No, not that one.

Chapter Notes

A lot of you were excited to see how Will handles the new information he's learned. Well here it is, a few days early because I love you.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After a grueling two hours filled with trying on clothes and hopping from store to store, Will finally has what he will wear to Hannibal’s dinner party.

The outfit is almost exactly as Bev described it when she was going on her diatribe of what kind of clothes he should wear. The turtleneck sweater is dark gray and the jacket is a slim cut, black, silky thing that catches beautifully in the light. He had wanted different pants than what Bev was wanting him to get, but he has to admit: the tapered leg slacks do flatter his shape better compared to his usual straight-fit style.

Bev had made another unnecessary comment about his apparent “bubble butt” which Will dutifully ignored, but otherwise spending time with her outside of work had actually been nice.

He got himself a pair of plain cufflinks and some Chelsea boots in dark brown as well. Bev had been right, his usual dress shoes were scuffed and worn and the oxford styles he had perused left little to be desired; either too fancy or too plain. He was unused to the style of the sleek, pull on boots, but he figured they would grow on him. Eventually. Maybe.

When their business at the mall had finally, blessedly, concluded, Will had thanked Bev profusely and offered himself up as being in her debt. With a straight face, she had said that all she wanted was for him to get drinks with her down at the local gay bar.

He figures there are worse debts.

But as he sits in his car with the heater on, putting his hands up to the warm air to get the chill off, staring at his phone as it rests unassumingly on the passenger seat, Will wonders if

he's wasted his time and money.

He tries not to think about the conversation between him and Alana earlier, but it's an impossible endeavor. Trying not to think about it only makes him overthink it, holding up each word and facial expression to the light and examining them from every possible angle. It's probably exactly as she intended.

So Hannibal still texts her on a regular basis to wish her a good day. Fine. Whatever. They're friends, even if Hannibal had told him their relationship was professional at most. Friends did that, he was sure. He wouldn't know, because he never had a friend that he wanted to keep in constant contact with, but he supposes not everyone could be a socially inept hermit like him.

He had figured Hannibal just wasn't big on texting because he certainly never sent Will routine inquiries via text, but apparently that wasn't the case. Apparently, he was just fine at texting, just not texting *Will.*

Will moves his hands away from the heat once they are sufficiently warm and goes to tap his fingers against the steering wheel. He plays Alana's words back in his mind for the hundredth time: *does he do that with you?*

Will sighs angrily, a huff of breath that leaves his lungs forcefully. It could be that Hannibal's reasons for *not* doing so involve the logic Will is ignoring in favor of letting his ire take the spotlight. Maybe Hannibal thinks there is no need for daily communication because they spend so much time in each other's company. Perhaps texting was obsolete, in his mind.

Will knows he can pick up his phone, text Hannibal every morning, every night. He could start that routine between them if he wants it so damn bad because now that he knows he can have it, he does. The difference is that such behavior is not in Will's nature where, apparently, it is in Hannibal's.

Will supposes that's the crux of what's bothering him. When he works past the hot clench of jealousy and really lets himself think, it's that even before they started officially dating, Hannibal hadn't texted him much unless it was appointment or work related.

And yet here he is – texting *Alana.* The woman he had previously had plans for. *Romantic* plans. Beautiful, perfect Alana with her wavy brown hair and ice blue eyes and pleasantly polite demeanor. A woman who would be perfect with Hannibal in a way Will could never hope to aspire to be.

It stings something fierce and he's upset, sitting in his idling car in the huge parking lot staring at his phone like it might bite him if he so much as looks at it wrong. He thought the distraction shopping with Bev provided would dull the hurt a little, that the passage of time would help, but it lingers and pokes like a toothache.

He doesn't even know if he wants to go to this stupid dinner party anymore. He knows exactly how he is going to act, feeling as he does now. He's going to make a scene.

He has to remind himself that Hannibal and Alana have known each other for years and he's just being a nutcase. Maybe it's a carry-over from their days at Johns Hopkins when they had

to stay in close contact as mentor and protegee. Maybe Will is reading too much into it. But then again, if he was, why did Alana say anything at all? To get a rise out of him, maybe? To make him question Hannibal's intentions and loyalty?

If that was her ploy, he'd be surprised. It seems completely out of character for a woman who usually holds herself so well to stoop to such levels.

But Will knows, better than anyone, what ugliness jealousy can bring out.

Will pulls his phone off the passenger seat with brute determination and swipes it open.

How would you feel about coming over early Saturday? Nothing would please me more than having your singular company before the festivities begin, beloved.

Will had left Hannibal on read for over two hours, bordering on three. It was rude, and slightly childish, but he had honestly been too upset to respond. He still is. He's upset over something stupid and instead of asking Hannibal about it and talking it out like a reasonable adult, he was giving him the silent treatment.

The more he thinks about it, the more he realizes it's not even about the texting, not only. He cares about it, but not enough to make him cause this much of a fuss. He knows it's a stupid thing to get upset over, but it doesn't change the fact that he is.

It all boils down to one thing: the fact that Hannibal possibly lied to him about something so insignificant. Lying about being a serial killer is understandable, but lying about something like this? It makes no sense.

The doubts he had about being with Hannibal hadn't gone away, but they had hidden in the shadows of Will's mind and started to slowly die, withering away to dust. They come back to life with a vengeance now, louder than ever.

Will bites his lower lip and presses the call button.

Hannibal answers before the first ring is up.

"Will," he says into the receiver, his voice caressing Will's name in a soft, intimate tone. "I was just thinking of you. How are you?"

Will licks his lips as he thinks of what to say: honesty or platitudes. Maybe he should just forget the whole thing and ask how his day is going, say that *yes, I'd love to come over early Saturday* so he doesn't fuck everything up.

He decides there's no reason to start being dishonest now (secret Ripper knowledge aside), and he hates sitting with conflict hanging over his head, heavy and sinking and sucking the life out of him. Alana's words won't leave his fucking head and he wants them gone.

Honesty then.

Will swallows back his anger so that his voice isn't shaking and ignores Hannibal's softly asked question. "Alana stopped by today."

There's not even a pause on the other end before the older man's tidy reply comes. "Ah. I assume it was to discuss this upcoming weekend? I informed her you would be attending."

"Right," Will says, still fidgeting with the steering wheel. "Was that before or after your daily 'have a good day' text to her?"

Now there is a pause on the other end of the line, long enough that Will wonders if the call dropped. The sound of wet lips parting; Hannibal must have just licked them. A tic. "It was after. She asked if she would see any new faces," Hannibal says after a moment. His voice gives away nothing.

Will hums, but otherwise doesn't respond. He lets the silence fill the proverbial space between them. His displeasure bleeds into it, staining it. Hannibal continues, "Shall we discuss it?"

"I think we should," Will says, trying to keep his voice disinterested.

"Where shall we begin?"

Will rolls his eyes. He tolerates Hannibal's therapy talk when they're in his office, but outside of it, it's old hat. "We?" Will asks incredulously. "I'm thinking this is a conversation you start, starting with how daily texts wishing her a good day is considered professional. You said your relationship was only professional, right, or did I mishear you?" Will is proud that his voice doesn't raise or tremble. He sounds as calm as if he were asking about the weather.

"You didn't." Hannibal at least has the decency to sound sheepish, even if only slightly.

Will now runs his thumb along one of the cracks in his steering wheel instead of just rubbing his thumb over it, digging into it so he can have something to do with his hands that feels remotely satisfying. "You said you stopped fostering any closeness with Alana months ago. You can imagine my surprise when she mentioned she thought you had your sights set on her not two weeks ago after what you had told me the other night."

"I can, indeed. What else did Dr. Bloom happen to mention?"

Will snorts. "Are you worried she said something incriminating?"

"No. I know my own intentions. Her perception does not lay the blame at someone else's feet. I'm merely curious as to what all she's said to upset you, Will."

He sounds like he genuinely cares even though he still offers no explanation. It makes Will's eyes sting.

"It doesn't matter what she said, it matters what *you* said. You told me you had stopped all of that once you found out you had feelings for me which, as I understood it at the time, was way beyond two weeks ago. She said you still talk almost every day and she made it seem like it was in an unprofessional capacity. Help me make sense of it, Hannibal."

Will can hear the soft sound of rustling papers on the other end. A book or something closing. "Will. What else did she say?"

Will sighs softly. He doesn't understand why it fucking matters. He doesn't understand why Hannibal is asking instead of just saying the truth.

"She mentioned the beer, how you used to invite her over often, the daily texting, how you brought her lunch." *Like you brought me lunch.* "Then she asked me if I thought you texted all your friends daily like you do with her."

"I see she used past tense," Hannibal points out.

"For most of it," Will responds. "You sure don't text me everyday. Now or before."

There is a pause again, longer than the first. The longer Will hears the silence, the more the pain blooms in his chest, the disappointment. Digging his thumbnail into the steering wheel is no longer enough. He digs it into his palm instead and stares absently as his skin blanches and then turns a bright red around it. The slight pain does nothing to ground him.

"Am I being given the chance to explain, or was this a courtesy call to let me know you will not be attending this Saturday?" Hannibal asks. Disappointment colors his tone, as does a foreboding sense of resignation.

It's tempting to say that he won't be coming, let Hannibal stew in his awful decision making skills, maybe cut off contact for a week and really make him feel it, but Will would be punishing himself right along with him.

"Oh, you will explain. I'd prefer to understand exactly what's going on. We'll see how I feel from there," Will replies. "I just. I can't wrap my mind around why Alana was under the impression you and her were an unconfirmed item until only a few weeks ago when you told me you stopped months ago. You made me a promise, Hannibal. The truth would have been … I mean, I wouldn't have liked it, but I still would have preferred it to you lying to me and making me an empty promise."

"You think I lied to you," Hannibal intones after a lengthy pause. Will is so used to Hannibal's mask of vague emotions that the abject displeasure in his words now causes his stomach to flip. "You think I made you an empty promise?"

"I don't know," Will exclaims. His non-responses are starting to grate on his nerves. "I don't know. Something isn't adding up," Will lowers his voice with that, trying to get his voice calm and steady again, still waiting for that explanation so that the nasty feelings inside of him could dissipate and he wouldn't have to think about this shit anymore.

"You know the influence you have over people, Hannibal. You know what you are doing at all times," Will delivers as gently as he's capable of at the moment. "You can't honestly expect me to believe this is taking you by surprise."

For a normal person, this would likely be insignificant. He suddenly feels foolish about the whole thing. He hates that he let his emotions carry him this far, but it's too late to go back now.

He wants to hang up and forget this ever happened, go back to being a lonely man in the woods, nurse his heart back to health. He doesn't consider it broken yet, but their conversation has only just begun and he's waiting patiently for the other shoe to drop. He feels like he has been ever since this whole thing began with the kiss by Will's door. Maybe even before that.

"The promise I made you was not empty, Will," Hannibal urges Will to believe him. Will can hear the urgency in his voice. "I do still talk with her frequently, but it's typically business related. Very rarely, anymore, is it to inquire about her personal affairs, and when it is, it is only because it would be rude not to." A pregnant pause on the other end. Will waits. It's all he can do. Words escape him.

When Hannibal next speaks, his voice is soft. "Do you want me to stop? You said I could keep my friendship with her, but if that's changed, I need to know. It is not my intention to worry you over this."

Will exhales sharply. "Is it a friendship or is it professional? Where do you draw the line?"

"I suppose what constitutes a professional relationship is subjective, but I would say that I treat her no better or worse than anyone else I consider myself professional with. And there are some people I'm professional with that I also consider my friend; among them being Jack and a few others."

Will thinks about Beverly, how he's professional with her, but also her friend. The line between those two concepts, for him, is drawn depending on their location. At work he is professional, outside of work, he's slightly less professional.

Maybe the same can be said for Hannibal.

Something still picks at his mind. "She said, specifically, that you still text her with 'have a good day' on an almost daily basis and then asked me if I thought you did the same with your other friends. It got me curious. Do you?"

Hannibal sighs. "If three to four times a week after concluding a short exchange regarding our professions counts as daily 'have a good day' texts, then yes, I suppose I do." He sounds aggravated, but Will feels certain it's not directed at him. "She is usually the first to reach out, and I am merely polite, as I am with everyone."

Will's frustration is rising. It still doesn't make sense. "Why would she tell me you did if you don't? It's not like her to exaggerate."

"It is possible that I led her too far along and her feelings are clouding her judgment," Hannibal says hesitantly. "I cannot say for certain."

Will knows that any other person would be spooked by Hannibal's blatant use of another human being, but Will can't find any compassion within himself for Alana. Not right now, at least.

“I would like to offer you the chance to go through my phone if that is what you need. It would be no trouble to me,” Hannibal says after a while of tense silence.

Yes. Say yes. Will screws his eyes shut. No. He won’t be that person. He refuses. “No thank you,” he responds, voice clipped.

“Will. I don’t want you to harbor any doubts about me, or about my feelings about you. My singular, monogamous feelings for you. I’d be happy to show you the truth of things,” Hannibal replies. He sounds absolutely serious and Will is seriously considering it.

“You could just delete the ones you didn’t want me to see.” God, he hates himself; absolutely fucking hates himself because he wants to say yes.

“I could, but I wouldn’t. Besides, it would leave obvious gaps. You are too smart for that.”

“Don’t try to flatter your way out of this.”

“I am only being honest. As I have been being. Nothing I told you that night was a lie, Will. Nothing.” He can hear Hannibal take a breath. “I used to bring her lunch, it's true,” Hannibal says. “I sent her flowers on her birthday. I invited her to my home often. It would have been suspicious if I ceased being overly gracious with Dr. Bloom suddenly.”

“Why not just tell me that?” Will asks, frustrated. “I’m not so fragile that I can’t handle the truth.”

“I know you’re not, but what I said was the truth. My goal was to peter off daily contact in increments so as not to make anything awkward between us. We still have to work together and we are in the same social circles. And of course, I do wish everyone a pleasant day at the conclusion of a conversation. She is not alone in that regard.”

As far as explanations go, it’s a decent one, one that Will finds himself understanding. It makes sense. If Hannibal had been buttering her up to use her for an alibi, then suddenly stopping such gestures would come across as strange and would incite further investigation on Alana’s part, which would lead to more lies and manipulations on Hannibal’s.

Doing it this way was almost polite.

Will hesitates. He feels so fucking stupid, but the words bubble up out of his throat before he can catch them. “Did you sleep with her?”

Hannibal answers without hesitating. “No. I’ve not even so much as kissed her hand. My plan was to keep the possibility open, nothing else. Of the two of us, you have had more intimate contact with her than I ever have.”

Will knows. Will knows what her mouth tastes like, what her lips feel like against his.

Will is a hypocrite.

“Did you want to?” Will asks, dreading the answer. He feels ready to vomit from the nerves in his stomach.

Hannibal, once again, doesn't hesitate with his answer. "I considered the possibility of sexual compatibility, but I did not actively desire her, no. It was purely academic. You did though. Didn't you?" It doesn't sound accusatory, merely curious. Will envies him his calm in asking such a question.

Will bites his lip. Did he want to? He doesn't remember. He remembers wanting stability of all things, with anyone that could provide it, and Alana had been the one brave enough to reach out first. He had latched on to her because, in his sick mind, there was nothing else he could do.

He had latched on to Hannibal, too, with an intensity that was jarring. And he does remember wanting him, even then, with vivid clarity.

"No," Will says honestly. "I wanted stability, not a pity fuck. If I was to have that, I would have preferred it to have been from you."

Hannibal tsks. "You know that's not what it would have been."

"I didn't know that then," Will says back. "Hannibal, when we were just friends, you hardly reached out to me. When she asked me if I thought you texted all your friends like you do her, I had no idea what to even say," he grumbles pathetically. He is pathetic.

"We were never just friends, were we?" Hannibal responds softly, reverently.

Will thinks of all the dinners they shared, the lingering glances, the casual touches. He thinks about Hannibal doing the same to Alana and it turns his stomach even further. "Hannibal," he warns.

"The reason I didn't reach out to you, Will, was because I was concerned about overstepping."

Oh. He supposes that also makes sense. Will is touchy about his personal boundaries and wouldn't have tolerated daily contact from anyone else. "You wouldn't have been," Will says.

"I didn't know that then," Hannibal parrots back to him. "I was reluctant to scare you off before I could even have you. With Alana, I knew contact would be welcome. With you, I was horribly unsure. Trust me when I say I wanted to. Everyday, it crossed my mind; asking you what you were doing, wondering how you were. Every damned day, Will."

Will brings the thumb he was digging into his palm up to his mouth, biting at the nail. Okay. The tendrils of dread are starting to unwind in his chest, making him feel somewhat lighter. Not gone, just lessened.

His self hatred, however, is reaching critical levels. He can't believe he made such a big deal over what turns out to be nothing.

Okay, he can believe it.

"Will. Do you want me to stop?"

“Stop what?” Will asks petulantly.

“I can keep it strictly professional with Dr. Bloom if that is your wish. I can stop wishing her a pleasant day, I can stop using her first name. I would do anything to put your mind at ease.”

Hmm. Interesting.

“You’re encouraging this,” Will notes with faint surprise. “You … you like that I’m like this.”

“Of course I do,” is all he deigns to say. He sounds supremely pleased. “Do you want me to stop, Will?”

Will continues biting at his thumb nail. If he’s honest with himself, the answer is yes, he does want Hannibal to stop. However, there is a difference between accepting that he’s a jealous asshole and being an actual controlling jealous asshole. He has no desire to cross that line even though he’s being pushed towards it.

But, he is curious. “You would, if I asked?” Will asks, less disbelieving by the second.

“I would. There would of course be times where we’d need to see each other, but I would cease all superfluous contact with Dr. Bloom. You only have to ask.”

Dangerous. Will feels the possessive beast emphatically agreeing with Hannibal, roaring to say yes, but his compassion wins out.

“No, I don’t want that. I was just confused by what she was telling me. I wanted to clear it up.”

“Will, let me assure you that everything I told you that night was the truth. I don’t see her in a romantic light, and I stopped fostering any closeness between us when I said I did.”

Except for the texting, but Hannibal had already cleared that up and Will is reluctant to beat a dead horse.

Will nods even though Hannibal obviously can’t see it. Any movement of his body helps to dissipate the unwelcome remnants of his needless pain. Leaning back in his seat, phone pressed to his ear, Will closes his eyes as some of his anxiety and hurt wisp away and lets him breathe. His body feels lighter like he just set down something heavy, his mind clearing, the red tainting his thoughts lessening.

Hannibal hadn’t lied to him. It was just a misunderstanding.

“Do you still invite her over? Dinner parties aside?”

“I do, but it is largely to discuss professional matters. On my side, at least. Does that make you uncomfortable?”

“Yes.” Will hates himself. Absolutely hates himself. To this end, he knows he shouldn’t ask Hannibal to stop. He has no right to. He is going to have to trust that when the time comes for

the other man to drop his losses, he'll be more classy than to do it with an affair. "Just by herself?"

"Not lately."

Will thinks. Thinks some more. Hannibal is encouraging his possessive behavior. In fact, he sounds positively giddy about it. Will doesn't have to wonder why, not when Hannibal has already confirmed, twice now, that he *likes* this about him for whatever reason.

He knows he shouldn't ask Hannibal to stop. That doesn't mean he's going to.

Will decides then and there that if Hannibal wants his green-eyed monster, he'll get it. It's hard enough keeping it in check without such sweet encouragement. "I don't want you spending time alone with her anymore unless it's in a professional setting or unless there are other people present."

"Done."

Will blinks. "Just like that?"

"Just like that. I would do anything for you, Will."

The words cause a pang in his chest. He can hear it, clear as day, how much Hannibal utterly means it. Here he is, causing a fuss over something that didn't deserve to be fussed over, and Hannibal was accommodating him. It felt unreal. Worse, it felt undeserved.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry I'm like this," Will says quietly, scrubbing a hand through his curls.

A soft sound from the other end, comforting. "There is nothing to be sorry about. I would have reacted similarly."

"I have a hard time believing that. No one is worse than me when it comes to … this."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that," Will can hear the shrug in his voice. "While I've never been inclined towards jealousy, it is not because I'm incapable. I assure you, I can be very capable with the right motivation."

Will wonders if he is that motivation, but is too scared to ask in case he isn't. The jealousy in his heart is an ugly thing, but misery is a demon always shared best by two. He doesn't want to be the only one like this. He usually is.

He wants a crazy to match his own. He wants it to be real enough to touch and feel.

Hannibal is many things, but crazy is not one of them. Despite his pastimes, the man is completely, boringly sane. Will is alone with his jealous monster.

"Are we okay?" Will asks. He doesn't feel completely better, but what more is there to talk about?

“You had a concern. You brought it to my attention and we talked about it. You are not asking me to do something that causes me conflict or distress. Everything is alright.”

He doesn’t agree. He has no right to tell Hannibal what to do with his life; nothing about this is okay, yet here they are. Will appreciates that it wasn’t a true fight because he was ready for one.

“Okay,” Will says in lieu of anything else. The air between them still feels weighted with something, remnants of Will’s own discomfort, no doubt. He wants it to go away. “I told Alana about us.”

Hannibal hums, pleased. “I’m afraid I consider that good news, yet you sound so dour about it.”

Will rolls his eyes. “It was impulsive. She was saying all those things, making it out to be like I was imagining your attention. It just came out,” Will says, going back to fidgeting with the steering wheel. “She thinks me going this weekend is a bad idea.”

“She said so to me as well. I disagreed with her.” Hannibal asks after a beat of silence, “She said you were imagining things?”

“Yeah. Nice, right? Because for a long time, I thought I was.”

“That is quite rude,” Hannibal replies. His voice has gone suspiciously cold. Will swallows thickly. Did he just ensure Alana was going to end up on a dinner plate? “I will have to talk with her about that.”

“No,” Will says quickly, not wanting to cause any trouble. He’s causing enough as it is. “Don’t worry about it. I straightened things out.” Will takes a silent breath to break up the tension wreaking havoc in his chest. “It’s okay.” It’s not okay, but damned if he’ll cause more upheaval than he already has.

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to insist. That was incredibly insulting of her, and seeing as you are my partner, if she offends you, she offends me. She had no right to insinuate such things.”

“Please don’t, Hannibal. I defended myself just fine. I don’t need you to come riding in on white horse,” Will asserts. “It’s fine.”

Hannibal is quiet for a time, likely weighing the pros and cons of disrespecting Will's wishes. “If you insist,” he finally says. It’s silent between them for a few minutes. Will focuses on breathing through the last of his tension, but it isn’t working. “Are you busy tonight?”

He sounds quietly hopeful.

Will’s stomach does a funny twirl in his abdomen. “I’m not,” he responds hesitantly, unsure of if he’s ready to face the man after such a stupid tiff. Tension still hangs around them like wisps that refuse to disappear causing goosebumps to break out along his flesh.

“I would like to see you, if you’re amenable,” comes the gentle request. It’s such a sweet thing to say. Will allows himself to smile for the first time all day, but it still feels slightly forced.

“Did you have something on your schedule free up?” Will asks.

“Not as such. I will always make time for you,” he says simply, and Will can’t stop from melting. If this is how he got after a tiff, it would make staying mad at him impossible.

Will sighs. “I don’t want to interrupt your schedule, Hannibal. We can wait until this weekend.”

“I’d really rather not, if it’s all the same to you.”

Will finds himself almost smiling, surprised he hasn’t scared Hannibal off yet. He supposes it would take a lot to scare the Ripper off. “What did you have in mind?”

He hears a thoughtful hum. “You don’t have classes tomorrow, correct?”

“That’s right.”

“Come over. Stay the night tonight,” Hannibal requests, his voice low and intimate. “I will leave you my spare key so that you may leave only when you wish in the morning. Or afternoon." And then, "Please.”

Will only has to think about it for half a second before he knows he’s going to say yes, Hannibal’s sweet plea sealing the deal. “We’re going to have to learn how to spend time apart, you know.”

“I don’t see why.”

“Because it’s … fuck, I don’t know, either. Okay. What time should I be by?”

“My last appointment ends at eight, I will be home by eight-fifteen, eight-thirty at the latest.”

“Okay. I’ll be there.”

“I can’t wait to see you, Will.”

Will hesitates before responding, not because he doesn’t miss Hannibal, but because the level of attachment he already feels for the man is frightening.

“Me too.”

After they say their goodbyes and hang up, Will sighs and knocks his head back against the headrest, tossing his phone back onto the passenger seat.

He supposes it could have gone worse.

When Will gets home, he takes his time caring for his dogs and playing with them in the yard for a few hours to make up for the fact that he'll be leaving them alone for the night again. He packs an overnight bag and, after checking to make sure he's not leaving too early, he heads out as the sun is setting, leaving the lamp in the living room on and setting down extra blankets for the dogs to cuddle up in.

On the hour drive there, his mind is full of tension, questions, and insecurities that rattle around in his skull. What will it be like being around Hannibal after what was more or less their first fight? Would it be awkward? Uncomfortable? Was Hannibal just asking for him to come over so he could dump him in person like a true gentleman would?

Will is not looking forward to finding out.

It's dark as he pulls up to Hannibal's home and gets out of his car, nervous energy thrumming under his skin. He is greeted at the door before he can knock and is promptly dragged inside.

Hannibal closes the door swiftly and pushes Will against it, swallowing Will's bewildered question with a deep kiss before he can ask it. Will closes his eyes instinctively despite having to take a second to figure out what the fuck is going on.

And then, suddenly and with a thunk, Hannibal is dropping to his knees.

"I'm sorry," the older man utters against Will's clothed stomach. Will blinks down at him owlishly. Those were not words he'd ever thought he'd hear from Hannibal's mouth. "I should not have left the decision regarding Dr. Bloom up to you. If I had been in your place, I would have wanted you to decide what was best for us on your own. I would have wanted you to decide in my favor. I should pay you the same courtesy."

"Hannibal, what are you talking about?"

"I asked you if you wanted me to stop my friendly association with her. I should have made that decision myself based on your comfort. I'm sorry."

"It's fine, what are you doing down there –"

"It's not fine," Hannibal insists. "I should remember that I'm no longer the sole occupant of my world."

Will shudders as Hannibal untucks his shirt and tugs it up to reveal his belly. "Hannibal –"

"Please. Let me atone," he all but pleads, looking up at Will intently.

Seeing Hannibal on his knees brings back memories of their first time together. Hannibal had let Will take the lead, had wanted him to. Will remembers with perfect clarity the look of complete rapture on Hannibal's face as Will had taken what he wanted. He remembers how Hannibal had shuddered when Will had praised him, had moaned so prettily when Will had taken the lead and bossed him around.

But that had not been a punishment, or atonement, or whatever it was Hannibal thought Will needed right now. That had been a natural progression of intimacy, helped along by Will's ability to read past Hannibal's rigid mask and understand the situation.

Will shakes his head. "You don't have anything to atone for, Hannibal. You did nothing wrong. I let her get to me. That's my fault, not yours."

"I want you to use me," Hannibal says hotly, his voice like gravel. He hasn't looked away from Will's confused gaze, gripping onto his flanks like a lifeline.

Will's mind blanks as blood rushes south fast enough to leave him dizzy. Hot tendrils of possessive desire curl seductively in his stomach, traveling down to his groin and tightening it. Will is glad Hannibal is holding him up because he would have collapsed otherwise.

Will looks down at Hannibal, staring up at him plaintively, adoringly, eyes glowing and mouth a grim line of determination. Will reads him like an old, familiar book. He wants Will to own him. He wants Will to stake his claim.

Will tilts his head consideringly. He's starting to understand that while this may be unnecessary for him, it isn't to Hannibal. Will thinks hard about what he's about to do as he pets through Hannibal's flaxen hair. He can tell the doctor is starting to get impatient, so Will shoves two fingers into his mouth to calm him down. Hannibal starts to suckle on them immediately, eyes closing and blissed out expression taking over his face.

Hannibal is a man who is a stranger to regret and remorse – not the concept of them, but the *feeling* of them. When these feelings happen upon the nerves in his body, he does not know what to do with them.

This is all he feels he can do for whatever wrong he thinks he did, and Will wants to give that comfort to him.

Will's jealousy from earlier, the hurt that had lingered after he and Alana's conversation, the tension that had remained after he and Hannibal's – he doesn't want any of it to touch this moment. This is not a punishment because there is nothing to punish. This is about giving Hannibal emotional security like he had given to Will.

Hannibal indulges Will's jealousy, soothes it. Will wants to do the same for Hannibal. Indulge his needs, soothe him. There is a latent penchant for sexual submission coming about, taking them both by surprise, and Will wants to give him a safe space to explore it.

Hannibal wants to be used. So Will is going to use him.

"I want you to ask me," Will says, stroking a hand through his fringe, tucking it behind his ear. He slips his soaked fingers from Hannibal's mouth.

Hannibal blinks slowly at the loss. "Will, won't you use me? Whatever you want. Please."

Fuck but he begs so prettily. "Good." Will licks his lips. "Open my pants, but don't take them down. You'll suck me off with my clothes on. You want my trust back? Earn it."

“Yes, Will.”

Hannibal unzips and unbuttons Will’s pants after unbuckling his belt and parts the halves to reveal his small bulge protruding from underneath his cotton boxers. Will watches from above as the older man then opens the front of his boxers and bares him to Hannibal’s hungry gaze. Hannibal licks his lips slowly and leans in, looking up once more.

Will sees the invitation for what it is and sinks both hands into Hannibal’s hair, gripping his head and pulling forward just as he thrusts his hips out. The contact is immediate as Hannibal opens his mouth the second Will touches him, taking him into his wet, sucking heat. Will wastes no time in grinding forward into the delicious sensation, wringing his fingers through blonde strands and bucking his hips into Hannibal’s obedient mouth.

Hannibal tightens his lips and presses the flat of his tongue firmly along Will’s length to give Will a proper sleeve to fuck into. Will loves watching the flex of his jaw, the fluttering of his lashes. Hannibal looks resplendent, like he wants to be nowhere else but here on his knees for Will.

Will rubs his cock into Hannibal’s mouth faster, keeping his grip on his head firm as he tugs his hair to move him as he likes.

Vibrations from Hannibal’s moans touch the nerves of Will’s groin with a vengeance, amplifying the pleasure he is already feeling to the point where it’s a struggle to keep his eyes open. His head wants to fall back against the solid wood of the door pressed behind him, but there’s not a second of this that he wants to miss. Hannibal is undulating his hips into nothing and moaning on Will’s cock like he’s starved for it.

He feels his center tightening tellingly, sparks traveling up his spine and down his extremities. He’s close. He wants Hannibal looking at him when he comes, but the man’s eyes are closed as he savors.

“Hannibal, look at me,” Will manages to utter out between gasping breaths.

With great effort, the older man blinks his eyes open. They’re wet. Will knows it’s not because he’s choking on all two inches of him.

Will can sense how intense this is for him: being used, being owned, belonging to someone. Despite his overwhelming pleasure, he reads the cues for what they are, there for the taking. Desperate eyes that can’t stay still, face flushed with equal parts passion and debasement, hands gripping Will’s hips tight enough to blanch the skin under his clothes – Hannibal is having a religious experience.

Will is his god.

Seeing Hannibal with slick smeared on his mouth, his red lips wrapped plush and secure around him, tears in his eyes as humps the air, it’s all it takes with the wet suction tight around him. Will bucks his hips hard into Hannibal’s face as he comes with a shuddering gasp, gripping blonde hair tight enough to feel some of the strands snap. Hannibal moans loudly. He’s pressing Hannibal so tightly against him that the older man’s nose is squashed

against Will's pelvis, his face red from lack of breath, his moan at the rough treatment reverberating through Will's entire body.

A choked sob leaves Hannibal's throat.

Will gentles his grip immediately, shame filling his gut. He doesn't allow himself to come down from the high of his orgasm before he's dropping down to his knees in front of Hannibal and pulling the gasping man into his arms.

He knows what he needs to say, but the words stick in his throat. He wraps his arms around Hannibal and pulls him close and rubs his back in soothing strokes. He hopes it's enough.

The emotion coming off the doctor is … overwhelming. Will can barely pluck a string out of the barrage of threads before it's being ripped away, a new one emerging in its place. It is a cycle of continuity, and Will can only hold him through it as Hannibal experiences the wonder of something new, the exhilaration of being used, the comfort of belonging and trust, the sharpness of a love never felt. Will can feel it all.

With a start, Will realizes Hannibal is trembling.

Hannibal is clinging onto him tightly, still panting even though plenty of time has passed for him to catch his breath. Will nuzzles into his neck and speaks through the ball in his throat.

"You did so well," he praises. "So good, Hannibal. You did so good."

An apology for his behavior would be useless. Hannibal had asked for this, and he wouldn't likely accept it, but this atonement still feels out of place, the punishment too much when the crime had been negligible. Nonexistent. All in Will's frantically possessive head.

He knows praise is something Hannibal craves; his mind picks out this particular need with frightening ease, so he continues whispering sweet words into Hannibal's ear.

After a few minutes, Hannibal seems to have caught his breath. Will says, "Let me take care of you."

Hannibal swallows thickly. "There's no need," he says, control coming back in increments. Will is half grateful for it, half sad. The man in his arms is a facsimile of the man he usually is: shaking and vulnerable, gripping onto Will for comfort. Will worries that Hannibal is only slotting his mask back into place because he feels he has to.

Hannibal's grip loosens slightly as he pulls back to meet Will's eyes. His eyes, amber in the dim light of the entryway, dart down quickly before coming back up. Will could have almost chalked it up to being a trick of the light, and maybe before he would have, but he knows better these days. Hannibal is only human, despite what he might want others to believe. Will knows the truth of him.

He knows if he says anything, Hannibal will clam up. He doesn't want that. So he does the next best thing he can for him.

"Let me hold you."

“I’m fine, Will.”

He was expecting resistance. He’s okay with that. He knows Hannibal needs to resist the swelling of neediness inside of him, but he also needs to be helped with the come down from such an intense lovemaking. Will thinks about what to say, and revises accordingly.

“I need you to hold me,” he says, not waiting for a reply before he’s positioning Hannibal to sit cross-legged on the floor of his own foyer and climbing into his lap.

He wraps his arms and legs around the taller man and rests his head on his broad shoulder. Hannibal doesn’t move to reciprocate. His body is still and his muscles are tensed like a spring. Will goes over the last thirty minutes in his head, revisits their first time and the conclusions he has drawn.

Sexual submission does not equate to general submission. It could be that while Hannibal, whether he realizes it or not, prefers to be led in more intimate scenarios, he needs control in every other aspect of his life. Will can accept that without issue. He wouldn’t ask Hannibal to change.

It could also be that Hannibal would benefit from a more assertive partner, someone to put him in his place, to be his equal in all things. It would come naturally to Will to be that for the other man. So he has to try.

Putting on the demeanor he wears with his dogs, one that is gentle, loving, and firm, he says, “I wasn’t asking. Put your arms around me.”

Hannibal hesitates for the briefest of seconds before he’s doing as he’s asked, wrapping his arms around Will and resting his head against his. After a minute or so, Will can start to feel as, one by one, Hannibal’s muscles begin relaxing. After another minute, Hannibal is unconsciously tugging him in closer and nuzzling into his neck. His grip is almost too tight, but Will doesn’t mind.

“I’m sorry,” Hannibal says after a while. It’s the second time tonight he’s said those words and it still takes Will by surprise. “I’m not used to this.”

“You don’t need to apologize. Jesus, about anything. I overreacted. I’m a jealous bastard and if I’m not careful, it’ll drive you away. I need to work on it. You should be able to do what you want with who you want regardless of what I want.”

Hannibal kisses his neck. “What I want is to make you happy and comfortable. I told you it is no sacrifice to me. Dr. Bloom and I have known each other many years, but I would not consider her a loss. I would consider you a great loss. One that I could not ever fully recover from.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” Will says into the fabric covering Hannibal’s shoulder.

“Then you must trust that neither am I. Your jealousy will not scare me off.”

“You can’t know that.”

Hannibal strokes his hands up and down Will's back in soothing passes. Will settles deeper into his lap. "There are things about me, Will, that you do not yet know. Things worse than jealousy."

Oh, Will knows. It doesn't feel like the right time to say anything, though.

"Nothing about you could scare me, Hannibal," Will says honestly. "Whatever it is, I can handle it."

Hannibal pulls away, discreetly wiping at his cheeks. Will pretends he doesn't see. "You can't know that," Hannibal says despondently, a sad parody of Will's earlier words.

Will cups both of his cheeks in his hands and makes Hannibal look at him. Maybe now is the right time for some of the truth.

"I know you have a darkness in you, Hannibal. After you killed Budge, you barely needed any time before you were back at work. You helped Abigail hide a body. You can compartmentalize easily because you had to in your youth."

Hannibal stays quiet. Will doesn't.

"You told me about your sister, but you didn't tell me the whole story."

Hannibal starts to shrink away, but Will holds onto him. "Hey, that's okay. You don't need to. I'm not going to ask. But I know that whatever it was, it was violent. You were young, you loved her even though you didn't consider yourself to love anyone. Whatever happened didn't create you, but we can't deny that the things that happen to us in our formative years don't have a hand in shaping us."

Hannibal watches him as he speaks, looking equal parts reverent and wary. His grip is still tight around Will's waist. "And how is it you think it shaped me?" he asks with a curious tilt of his head.

"You have empathy, but you only direct it at those you consider worthy of it. You have a penchant for manipulation. You say the right things, and act the right way, but it's practiced, not natural. Most of the time, anyway. You take responsibility for your actions, but the consequences sometimes surprise you. Even then, you repeat them if it gets you what you want, or if you feel you need to. You are good at controlling your anger, but I don't think that's always been the case. Even now, you don't so much let it go as you save it for a later time."

The words swirl in the air between them for an indeterminable time before sinking to the floor around them. Hannibal is tense again, so Will takes Hannibal's hands from around his waist and brings them up to his lips, kissing each one softly and then holding them both to his chest.

"You've just described me as a psychopath."

Will wets his lips. “I don’t think that’s the right descriptor for you. As a psychiatrist, I expect you to keep current with the times,” Will admonishes. “That term is outdated.”

“You use it at work,” Hannibal interjects.

“I have to. They’re simpletons,” Will says bluntly. “It’s good versus evil to them, psycho or normal. There’s no gray area. There’s no thought except catching the bad guys.”

“But you’re different.”

Will shrugs. “Antisocial personality disorder is heavily stigmatized. Not every offender has it, and not everyone who has it is an offender. There's a gray area, and that’s true for everyone.”

Hannibal sniffs. “I don’t consider myself to have a disorder. I’ve never mistreated animals, and I am fully functional.”

“I never said you had a disorder, nor did I mean to imply that you did. But you do have the traits. A disorder is only a disorder when it disrupts your life. I don’t consider my autism to be a disorder anymore than I consider how many dogs I have to be. It’s just part of who I am. We all have parts.”

“Some parts are worse than others.”

“I love all of your parts, Hannibal. I don’t pick and choose.”

Hannibal looks down between them at where his hands are cradled to Will’s chest. “Maybe you should.”

Will chuckles wryly. “Maybe *you* should. Of the two of us, I’ve displayed more unhealthy behaviors than you have.”

There’s a second where Will thinks Hannibal is going to protest. It wouldn’t help if he did. They both know that Will’s jealousy exists and has already done its work in shaping some of their relationship. To deny it would be dishonest, a platitude Will doesn’t want.

“I enjoy every aspect of you, Will. Even that,” Hannibal says simply, like it’s the most obvious thing in the world.

Despite not fully coming clean about knowing Hannibal’s secret, Will feels lighter. The tension in his belly finally unspools completely and vanishes. By sharing part of his knowledge with Hannibal, he has created the beginnings of a safety net. Now, when he does eventually tell him, it will be less of a shock. He may react more favorably.

Will glances down between them. Hannibal had been so good for him and he wants to return the favor now that everything is smoothed over. Hannibal isn’t hard anymore, but, even in the dim lighting of the foyer, Will can see a large wet patch on the front of his pants.

Will reaches out, but then stops, looking back up at Hannibal to seek permission. The sound of a buckle being undone followed by a zip and then Hannibal is taking Will’s hand and

shoving it unceremoniously into his underwear. His soft cock is covered in dried spend and twitches in his palm at the touch.

“Your hands were on me,” Will says, awestruck.

Hannibal glances down at his lips and then back up slowly, licking his own. Will can still see smears of his own fluid on the older man’s mouth, dried into his five o’clock shadow. It sends heat thrilling deep in his stomach. “Yes,” is all he says. His voice is rough.

Will is having a hard time believing Hannibal has, once again, come without a hand touching his cock, just at sucking Will off. It’s a beautiful, heady, dangerous feeling knowing he can do that to this man.

Hannibal is the one to lean in and their lips meet in a soft kiss, lips parting to slot together. Will sighs into it, taking in the sensation of Hannibal against him like this, wanting him like this. He still can’t believe it sometimes. He can’t believe that he can kiss this man whenever he damn well pleases now, after months of thinking he'd never have the chance.

Hannibal had just given him a rare gift, another on top of everything else he’s given him. The intimacy quickly building between them cannot flourish with the secrets they still keep, but for now, it’s going to have to. They will have to persevere.

He pulls away from the kiss with one last peck and Hannibal follows his movement, trying to keep the contact between them with a sweet whimper of loss. Will is weak. He kisses Hannibal again, urgently, taking his face between his hands and opening his mouth for Hannibal’s questing tongue.

He can’t lose this. He can’t. He needs to come clean. They both do.

What if it would be simpler to keep his secrets, and Hannibal keeps his, and they just pretend like everything is normal?

This would end as quickly as it started if they did that. There was no way it was sustainable. There would eventually come the time where they would live together, Will was sure of it, and how would Hannibal explain away his odd disappearances? How would Will keep stumbling across Ripper tableaus with Jack breathing down his neck and act like it wasn’t the work of the man who had come to mean everything to him?

He could say it right now. Just five little words. *I know you’re the Ripper.* He could weather through whatever reaction Hannibal would have. He could show him that he wasn’t going anywhere.

But what if *Hannibal* went somewhere? What if he left? What if Will did the right thing and told him he knew, and Hannibal vanished? If he told him now, this might be the last time he ever has this.

He’s not ready.

Hannibal strokes his big hands, warm and soft, up Will’s arms. “Have you eaten?”

Will shakes himself from his melancholy thoughts. “Mall food. I was hungry again thirty minutes after I ate.”

“You went shopping?” Hannibal asks, rightfully surprised.

“Yeah. I wanted to get something nice to wear for this weekend.” After thinking about it, Will adds, “Bev went with me. I can’t put together an outfit to save my life,” he jokes. He wonders if Hannibal is like Will at all, or if the thought of him spending time with someone else is of no matter.

Hannibal doesn’t seem perturbed, so Will sighs a breath of relief. Being a cannibalistic serial killer aside, Hannibal seems to have a much healthier level of jealousy than Will does. That, or he hides it better. “I can’t wait to see it,” Hannibal says.

Will grins at him and hopes it doesn’t look as devastated as he feels. “Can I help you cook?”

“You may,” Hannibal grins back. Will stands up and holds his hands out for Hannibal and he grasps them, letting himself be pulled up. Will tries to let go, but Hannibal holds him tight enough that Will knows he longs to hold him tighter. “I love you, Will.”

God. Will has to tell him, but the courage to do so is slipping away like sand. Hannibal pulls away and is looking at him with such love, such devotion, a dark sort that has teeth and claws and promises to never let Will leave.

It should scare him, but it doesn’t. It should comfort him – if Hannibal digs his claws in, that means nothing Will says will tear him out – but comfort is a far away dream. Will, instead, feels a buzzing under his skin. It’s the words he wishes he could say.

He’s a coward. He can tell himself all he wants that it’s just not the right time, but there will be no right time. He has no idea how Hannibal will react and he wants to keep this a little longer. Just a little longer.

As he follows Hannibal into the kitchen, Hannibal shooting him coy glances as they prepare their meal, the buzzing sensation doesn’t subside. It only grows with every lingering kiss Hannibal places on his skin as they work.

Chapter End Notes

Idk what it is about subby Hannibal, but I love writing him apparently. I'm unsure as to if I should tag for it, but seeing as they are not entering into an actual d/s relationship, I think just a tag for "undertones" yeah?

Thank you for the love you guys have paid this garbage fire of a fic. Every kudos and comment lifts my spirits and gives me serotonin and I appreciate all of you.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

A bit of a necessary filler chapter where Hannibal does some introspection and Will makes his final decision.

Chapter Notes

I want to apologize for the shortness of this chapter. I've had a lot of things going on and couldn't devote my time to writing like I usually do, but I'm satisfied with this chapter despite the length. I will more than make up for it with the next chapter.

As always, thank you for being here and continuing to support this little fic that has grown beyond my wildest dreams. I never thought I had the capacity to write a multichaptered fic like this, but here I am, and here you are. Please enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Hannibal wakes up the next morning, it’s to the sight of Will curled up on his side next to him, one arm thrown with lazy possessiveness over Hannibal’s middle, the other tucked tight against his own chest. His mouth is slightly parted as he slumbers. His hair is endearingly disheveled, a mess of dark curls on Hannibal’s pillow that he longs to touch.

It’s a sight that renders him momentarily breathless. It’s a sight he longs to wake up to for the rest of his life.

He has to get up, get ready for the day, but his heart protests when he tries to move. Leaving this bed feels … difficult. He briefly entertains the notion of rescheduling on his patients today, but it would be unbearably rude to do so on such short notice.

Will had been more affectionate last night than he usually was. Whether it was because of their argument, if it can be called that, or the scene that had played out in front of Hannibal's front door, he can't say for certain.

They had eaten a light meal together, Hannibal still trying to gather himself from the intensity of what had transpired and Will standing close to him at all times, almost overbearingly so. After they had cleaned up together, Will had led Hannibal to his own bedroom and undressed him as Hannibal stood there, unable to do anything but watch. Will had led them to Hannibal's bed after he had shucked his own clothing and had turned down the covers on both sides. Hannibal had felt relief that Will was staying.

He had scooted close to Hannibal under his thousand thread count sheets and had pulled him to his smooth chest, wrapping an arm around him securely and burying the other under their shared pillow. Hannibal had nearly wept for how good it felt to be held by someone who loved him. He can't remember the last time someone did. When he was a child, perhaps.

With a closed-eyed sigh that he would deny were Will awake, Hannibal lifts the covers from his naked body and rolls out from beneath them, already missing the warmth of his lover's body.

He showers thoroughly, dries off, shaves, and coifs his hair, applying a touch of cologne to his wrists and behind his ears. He decides to dress in his cream windowpane check suit after perusing his many options and pairs it with a white shirt and one of his favorite paisley ties and matching pocket squares. As he buttons up his waistcoat, he checks his reflection in the full-length mirror scrupulously to make sure there isn't a single line or hair out of place.

When he deems his person suit presentable, he steps out of his dressing room and into his bedroom where their combined scents still linger in the air. Hannibal breathes it in and holds it in his lungs for as long as he can before breathing out.

He wants this: Will's scent all over his house, his fingerprints on all of his things, his body in a bed they both call theirs. Hannibal walks on socked feet to the bed and gazes down at his sleeping lover, his partner. He longs to touch, but doesn't wish to wake him. He wants this quiet moment just a little longer.

He understands that Will wants to wait, but Hannibal wants him here, always, *now.* However, if Will were to move in, he would eventually ask about the locked cellar. Perhaps he'd offer to retrieve the wine one night, or he would stumble across the uneven floorboards and grow curious. If Hannibal moved in with Will, he would need to dismantle his basement piece by piece. He'd no longer have anywhere to work. He'd have to stop.

Hannibal sucks his lips between his teeth, hovering his hand just over where Will's hair fans across his pillow in beautiful waves. Would he be able to stop for him? He thinks there is nothing he wouldn't do for Will. He is changing, is perhaps already changed.

Yesterday, he had killed a man. A nameless pest who had berated a cashier at the local grocer he attends over two years ago. In a fit of pique, he had not displayed his body, had simply taken what he needed from him and put the rest in his incinerator. The bones he had scattered throughout the forests.

It was not unlike him to kill them without display; he killed more often than the Ripper did, so to speak. Will had once confessed to him that he was sure the Ripper killed between his displayed victims, and his clever man had been correct.

He was going to catch on, sooner rather than later, perhaps. Hannibal had taken him to get his encephalitis treated, and without that barrier of sickness clouding his brilliant mind, there was nothing stopping him. Hannibal lived in what seemed to be a constant state of pendulous suspense.

Any moment, Will could put the pieces together. Any moment, Hannibal could lose the only thing that mattered to him. Perhaps that is why he didn't display the pig yesterday. Perhaps if the Ripper retired, Will would never have to know. It could all just fade quietly into the background, another case unsolved.

There is another possibility, and a possibility within that one.

He could tell Will the truth. Will has an undeniable darkness in him. It's not a complete stretch to imagine he would be accepting, but maybe Hannibal was being wistful.

Or. He could tell Will, and Will would refuse him. There were measures Hannibal could take to ensure he wouldn't, but he was not the man he was months ago. Back then, it wouldn't have pained him to unravel Will's mind, to break him and let what he buried so deeply seep through the cracks. But now … it is different. *He* is different.

He is the one who unraveled, broken for this man who sleeps unawares of Hannibal's inner turmoil. He is the one who's deepest secrets – his humanity – are seeping through, tender and new and vulnerable.

His previous plans for Will had fallen to the wayside when Will had walked into his office that day, eyes searching around, glossing over Tobias Budge's body covered by a white sheet on his office floor. Everything Hannibal had envisioned for the younger man became obsolete in the wake of him being blessedly alive. His life had been the only thing that mattered. Hannibal hadn't been able to stop staring at what could have been a ghost come to haunt him, an angel come to avenge his sorrows. Deep blue eyes had scanned the room and come to rest on Hannibal who only had eyes for the man who just emerged through the door of his new life, victorious.

Hannibal frowns and thinks of the drugs he had used on Will when he was sick to help along his encephalitis. To ensure time lapses and states of altered consciousness. He starts to feel ill when considering doing so again. With curiosity, he examines the feeling – the compassion. Its inconvenience does nothing to sway it. It remains, pulsing with life like a fresh wound.

He sighs. He can't brainwash him. He would be unable to without causing himself serious pain. If Will ever found out, and he likely would as his mind started to, once again, unravel, it would break them. The thought in and of itself is too painful to consider.

Will has single handedly brought things to the surface that Hannibal knew existed within himself, but refused to acknowledge: his ability to love, his penchant for submission, his *enjoyment* of both these things.

Hannibal can't lose him.

Fear. Will deals with huge amounts of fear. Hannibal can now understand such a way of living. It sits ugly and creeping like vines in places that have rarely ever felt anything. He dislikes the sensation; crawling insects in his chest, fingers that refuse to stay at rest.

There is something else to consider that brings about such sensations: Will remembering all of what Hannibal did to him. The drugs, the hypnosis, the gentle suggestions while he was

under.

He's surprised it hasn't already happened. He wonders if Will's mind conjures up the memories in his sleep and he simply passes them off as nightmares.

Will snuffles cutely in his sleep and rolls over onto his back, scratching absently at his concaved belly. He's so beautiful, Hannibal aches. His creamy skin, the freckle here and there that Hannibal has already memorized, the faint scars under his pectorals. He is well muscled from manual labor, his biceps thick and his back strong. Hannibal enjoys this, wants Will to use that strength on him. He knows he can.

Never before has another person captured him so; mind, body, and spirit. To lose Will would be a devastation he would never recover from. It would rend him into pieces that could never be put back together. It would obliterate him.

In that moment, Hannibal decides that no matter the personal cost, no matter how much it pains him, he will do whatever is necessary to keep him.

He bends down to lay a gentle kiss to Will's forehead. "How you've ruined me," he whispers.

Resigning himself to more of that pendulous suspense, Hannibal goes downstairs to start breakfast.

Will stumbles into wakefulness at a decadent pace. He had slept free of dreams, but maybe not. Something rings in his head, words he can't hear clearly. A distant echo.

He feels soft lips kissing his forehead. Blinking his eyes open, Hannibal stands before him fully dressed in a three piece suit with his hair coiffed. Will was so worn out from his emotionally charged day the day before that he slept through Hannibal getting up and getting ready.

"I have to go, mylimasis. I love you."

"Love you too," Will mumbles, reaching up a clumsy hand to stroke the smooth skin of Hannibal's freshly shaven cheek. Hannibal tolerates this with nothing more than a fond look. "Have a good day."

"You as well. Your key is on the table by the door."

Will's brow raises in surprise. "My key? I thought you said it was a spare?"

"I changed my mind," Hannibal shrugs and smirks. It's gone in a few seconds, replaced with a well crafted affectation of casual placidity to hide his reticence. Hannibal should know better by now that he can't hide from Will anymore, but Will goes along with it anyways. "Will you be coming over early Saturday?"

Will smiles up at him. “Of course. Will I be expected to do anything?”

Hannibal dusts imaginary lint off his clean trousers. “I was wondering if you would be my co-host, actually.”

Will hums sleepily. “And what are the duties of a co-host?”

“You would help me greet the guests while I continue in the kitchen with the staff I hired, take their coats.” Hannibal takes a breath like he’s about to tell Will awful news. “You will have to mingle,” he relays playfully. Will chuckles.

“All part of the package, huh? Your fault if I end up scaring them off.”

“More food for us, in that case,” Hannibal says, smiling and completely uncaring that he’s entrusting these duties to a hermit. “You will be sitting at the other head of the table. I hope that will be alright?”

“Ah. The seat of honor,” Will says, stretching against the bed. Hannibal doesn’t hide his staring.

“I’m surprised you know that,” he replies thoughtfully.

“I’m not a complete hick.”

Hannibal smiles and leans down again to kiss him. “Get some rest. There is a plate for you downstairs. I will see you this weekend. Be here by five please. You can keep me company until the guests arrive.”

God, it’s such a long way away. Will groans. “Okay.”

“I appreciate you being willing to do this with me, Will.”

Will rolls his eyes fondly. “It’s not that big of a deal. I’ll be fine.”

With one last lingering look that lets Will know Hannibal is just as reluctant to leave, he goes with one final kiss. Will listens as his oxfords tramp gracefully down the wooden staircase and onto the floors below. He listens until he hears the front door open and close, the key locking the deadbolt. He listens as Hannibal’s Bentley starts up with a smooth purr and drives away.

Now would be the perfect opportunity to do some sneaking around, but Will really has no need to. He doesn’t need to look for evidence. He already knows the truth.

Instead, he helps himself to Hannibal’s massive walk-in shower, still wet from Hannibal’s earlier shower, and takes his time lathering up. When he gets out, he smells like Hannibal. It’s a small consolation prize to having the man’s company.

After he’s dressed, he goes downstairs and eats the simple breakfast of sausage and eggs Hannibal had prepared for him. He honestly can’t tell if it’s people or not. All he knows is

that it tastes good and it fills him up. The sausage cuts easily with his knife and fork and bursts with savory juices on his tongue.

He cleans up after himself and goes back upstairs to dress.

When he walks to the front door, the key is where Hannibal said it would be, shining silver on the dark wood of the end table. It sticks out and beckons him closer. Will walks to it carefully and touches it with probing fingers as if waiting for it to bite. It doesn't. Will picks it up and examines it under the light coming in from the window. It's just a key. His key. To Hannibal's house.

Will slots it with the rest of his keys on his keyring and feels something settle in his stomach.

He leaves, a dumb smile on his face as he locks up behind him.

The rest of the week passes by slowly for Will. He ties lures, finishes 100 Days of Solitude in the original Spanish, and perfects his lectures. He fishes, tossing back a few into the water since he will be cooking for one this week, and plays with his dogs. It's the life he lived before Hannibal. Quiet, peaceful, nothing much to worry about except for whatever horrors Jack wants him to delve into.

It's lonely.

Even before they started officially dating, Will and Hannibal had not spent much time apart. Dinner at least twice a week, sometimes more. Weekly sessions. Seeing each other at work for Jack. His week was usually filled with Hannibal; seeing him, thoughts of him. Going without makes him feel bereft of something vital.

He waits for a Ripper victim or three to drop as he goes about his daily life. He assumes that is what will be keeping Hannibal busy the week before his dinner party on top of his other responsibilities, but none do. He's almost disappointed when Tuesday comes to a close with only radio silence.

Will Hannibal be serving actual pork this weekend? Will chuckles to himself. Of course he wouldn't. Where would be the fun in that?

The next morning, he waits for a call from Jack as he gets ready for work, but none come. He tells himself he isn't disappointed.

He has always been fascinated by Ripper tableaus. The Ripper is serene and ordered when he floats through Will's mind. He steps lightly instead of stampeding through his head. His presence has never been a burden. His work is beautiful in a macabre sort of way and Will had been expecting to see something up close and personal.

Instead, his day passes in a boring blur of lectures and going over old cold cases for Jack. He checks his phone throughout the day, but the only person that texts him is Bev asking when they can go to the gay bar together. Will responds *maybe next weekend* and leaves it at that.

Sitting at his desk, staring at his half eaten ham sandwich and occasionally flicking his gaze to his phone, Will wonders if he should bite the bullet and be the one to text Hannibal first. He had made it clear that contact wouldn't be unwelcomed, but he knows Hannibal is busy with work and whatever else the Ripper does on Wednesdays.

As he's picking up his phone to send a begrudging *hope you're having a good day* text, it vibrates with an incoming message. He quickly fumbles to slide the screen open.

[12:27] *Thinking of you. Hopefully you are eating a decent lunch.*

Will smiles like an idiot and snaps a picture of said lunch and hits send.

[12:28] {img: 0456}

A few minutes pass before the next message comes.

[12:30] *Will.*

[12:30] decent is subjective dr lecter

[12:31] *Yes, I suppose it is. I should be glad your meal includes at least three food groups, provided there is cheese on that.*

[12:31] wouldnt be a real sandwich without cheese

[12:33] *I know what kind of cheese you keep in your refrigerator. Those processed orange slices of vague dairy product hardly constitute as cheese.*

Will lets out a chuckle at the message. It's such a Hannibal thing to say.

[12:34] judgy, judgy. theres totally real cheese in there somewhere

[12:34] *Your grammar is atrocious. I do hope you don't send work emails like this.*

[12:35] texting is informal communication. no grammar required

[12:35] you gonna grade me?

[12:36] *I wouldn't dare. I shall leave the grading up to you, Professor Graham.*

Will bites his lip. He does love it when Hannibal calls him that. It brings back to mind the night of their first time together when Hannibal had uttered it, voice husky and breathy in Will's ear. It sends a shiver down his spine.

[12:38] smart boy. what are you up to?

[12:45] *I am currently on my lunch hour. The first thirty minutes I dedicate to eating and the last thirty minutes I tend to catch up on my patient notes. If I am responding back slowly, it is because of that.*

[12:47] no worries

[12:47] this is nice

[12:47] i don't wanna interrupt your work

[12:52] *You aren't. I wouldn't have messaged you if I was too busy.*

It makes Will feel a little better. He was getting what he wanted, but he didn't want it to be at the expense of Hannibal's life. It was nice though, he hadn't been lying about that. It was nice to hear from him, nice to talk to him, even if through the screen of a phone.

It made him feel important to the other man, strangely enough, instead of forgettable. Hannibal had thought about him. It all felt incredibly silly. He was a grown man of thirty-eight, for crying out loud, not a lovesick teenager. Still, the thought mattered.

[12:53] thank you

[12:53] *Whatever for?*

Will bites at his lip as he thinks of how to respond. He glances at the time to make sure he isn't going to be late for his next lecture. He has time to type out one more.

[12:54] for this. its nice talking to you. would it bother you if i did the same?

[12:58] *Not at all. In fact, I would greatly appreciate it. I must go now, my next appointment is here. We shall talk soon, my love.*

Will, still grinning like a moron at his phone screen, sends off one last goodbye text before closing his phone and getting his bag. He heads to his lecture hall with some pep in his step that remains for the rest of the day.

The days pass much the same. Hannibal texts Will to let him know he doesn't need to come in for his usual appointment seeing as how they were together now and it would be inappropriate. Will is rather glad for it. Hannibal's therapy had helped him, he can't deny that, as much as he would like to, but therapy was still something he abhorred. He was glad Hannibal was drawing that line because Will would have used any excuse necessary to see him on a regular basis despite his feelings on the subject.

Wednesday bleeds into Thursday, Thursday into Friday. Will and Hannibal text everyday, and Friday night, they share a phone call. Will can hear him doing something in the background

and with a hysterical laugh that he keeps to himself, pictures the doctor dismembering a body while chatting about the antics Will's dogs have gotten up to.

Will continues distracting himself with his usual things: tying lures, reading, fishing, playing with his pack. He lets the dogs sleep on the bed with him every night.

Talking with Hannibal helps, but seeing him would be better. Will feels mildly pathetic pining after him like this, like he's some damsel in a drug store romance novel. He wonders if Hannibal is having a similarly difficult time and lets himself imagine that he is.

When Saturday rolls around, nerves are starting to settle along the lining of his gut. He had still been half asleep when Hannibal confirmed with him that he'd be coming early today. Helping to greet guests, tend to them, *mingle* with a bunch of snotty rich folk. He'll have to pretend to be interested in all the snotty things they have to say and pretend he cares when they brag about all the snotty things they do.

He worries. He worries that the Hannibal that will be hosting this dinner party won't be the same Hannibal he's become familiar with, the one that allows himself soft smiles and chuckles, the one that looks at Will like he hung the very stars, the one that came all over himself sucking Will off.

What he doesn't worry about, surprisingly, is the image he'll present. Even if he is the shabbiest one dressed there, and he's sure he will be, he truly trusts that Hannibal won't be ashamed of him.

The early morning sun is starting to rise above the distant clouds. Will spends most of his morning drinking coffee on his porch and watching his dogs play in the snow-covered yard.

He remembers a time, before he met Hannibal, where doing this felt nice. He liked being alone, even if he was lonely. There was no one he needed to hide from, no one he needed to perform for. It was just him and his pack and whatever he was sipping on. Life was quiet, if not boring, but boring was better than dreadful.

Now he is dreadfully alone. Every empty space around him is filled with what could be. Hannibal sitting next to him on the porch swing sipping on his own mug of high quality coffee, Hannibal remarking on something the dogs are doing, Hannibal making them breakfast while Will does some cleaning around the house. Hannibal, belly full of good food, beckoning him back to bed where they would spend the rest of the day touching and talking and making love.

Hannibal had said he envisioned such things himself. It's not like Will is alone in wanting that life. But the secrets between them … they were big, spanning the whole length of the distance between what could be and what is.

Will wants Hannibal as he is. There is no doubt about that. He wouldn't change a thing except maybe wanting Hannibal to be more careful. He wants his sweet kisses and easy smiles, his whispered words that drip with love and honey. He wants his teeth and his claws, blood smeared on his face, eyes unhinged after a kill. There is no part of Will that doesn't want every part of Hannibal Lecter.

He needs to tell him.

He thinks maybe he'll do it tonight.

Even if he dies, even if Hannibal leaves, he needs to tell him. Having Hannibal has not eased his ache for him, it's only made it worse. There is nowhere else for him to go but wherever Hannibal leads him. In having little snippets of Hannibal, he wants more and more each time. He wants them to live together, to never be apart, to come home to each other and wake up next to each other. He wants it on a piece of paper that Hannibal belongs to him. He wants them to be so intertwined that separation would be impossible.

Will has teeth and claws of his own. They long to sink into Hannibal and never let him go. He is no longer afraid of that part of himself. Hannibal had seen to that. He is no longer willfully ignorant of his darker impulses.

Being with Hannibal is like being alone without being lonely: he doesn't have to hide, he doesn't have to act. He can be himself and everything that entails and it's cherished, accepted, wanted. He considers himself privileged to have a love like this.

Tonight, he will tell him. No more squandering chances, no more distant fretting. It has to be tonight.

When three comes around, Will sated from a day of much needed laziness, he starts getting ready. His clothes are freshly dry cleaned, his boots are shined. He does everything he did for their first date, but he styles his hair this time, slicks it back so his curls are tamed except for a few that escape towards his forehead. He leaves off cologne and only applies the minimum amount of his new aftershave.

It's four. Will puts out extra food for the dogs and calls his neighbor to come take care of them in the morning, just in case he doesn't make it back home. He puts out peanut butter kongs and soft blankets on their beds and kisses each one goodbye like it will be his last time seeing them.

He lint rolls his clothes once they're settled, and goes to his car with his overnight bag with one more backward glance towards his white little farmhouse, full of his family. He hopes to survive this party. He hopes wishing the last guest goodnight turns into drinks by the fire, just the two of them and all the words they need to say. He hopes drinks by the fire turns into something else. Will will tell him, both men tired from a long night and eased by the pleasant burn of quality liquor, and then Hannibal will pull him close, and they will make love with nothing, finally nothing, between them.

He hopes, but if life has taught him anything, it's that there is nothing worse in life than hope.

He overlooks his property one last time as he sits in the car waiting for it to warm up. He likes it here. He would move wherever Hannibal wanted to, but he has always loved this house and the sanctuary it provided him, the sprawling land and his stream. If things take a turn for the worse, he'll come back here, whether in real life or in spirit, and settle in, remake himself into something that will never know pain again.

Will doesn’t let himself think about a good outcome. He would rather go into this expecting the worst so that he could be pleasantly surprised if what happens is the best.

He has to be strong. He has to commit to this because it has to be now. There can be no more waiting. They’re growing too close, only growing closer as the days pass. To wait until they were so entangled in one other would only make it worse on them both.

Will puts his gear shift into drive and takes off down his long, gravel driveway.

He’s going to tell him.

Chapter End Notes

dun dun DUN

Next chapter is sure to be a fun one ... *cringes in cannibal*

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

The dinner party.

Chapter Notes

I know a lot of people have been looking forward to this chapter, I hope it doesn't disappoint. Please enjoy, and thank you for being here. This was a lot of fun to write!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

As Hannibal is finishing up washing an assortment of fresh vegetables, a soft knock sounds at the door. Hannibal smiles and dries his hands while his small number of staff continues their work mixing sauces and dicing aromatics. Will is earlier than expected and, while earliness is usually something that irritates him, with Will it only makes excitement bloom warm and sharp in his chest.

It's been days since they've seen each other, days that have stretched lonely and cumbersome. Hannibal is nearly vibrating out of his skin with joy. A strange sensation, for sure, but not an unwelcome one.

With a smile still twisting his lips, he walks to the foyer and opens the door without bothering to look through the peephole.

A joke is perched on the tip of his tongue, something or other about waiting for Will to knock this time, but his witty words die in his throat when he opens the heavy wooden door, an aborted sound escaping his throat. The joy he feels is subsequently sucked out of him when he is met with a familiar pair of blue eyes, but not the ones he was expecting.

Alana Bloom smiles at him from the stoop, looking as beautiful as ever, and Hannibal can't muster anything but disappointment for seeing her.

His face falls incrementally, but then, remembering his manners, he provides her with his best smile. "Dr. Bloom, what an unexpected surprise." And an unpleasant one, at that. He glances over her shoulder for signs of a blue Volvo, but it's only her Prius in the driveway.

She smiles back, completely convinced that his is genuine. "I thought you could use some help like last time."

Presumptuous. She knows of he and Will's involvement and assumed he wouldn't ask him to co-host? Or perhaps she assumed Will would have outright refused, which wouldn't have been out of the realm of possibility, but his jaw still ticks at her misstep. He tilts his head slightly, thinking. He is not allowed to be alone with Alana Bloom, but his staff should suffice as other company. It will have to.

He very well can't tell her to leave now that she's arrived. Unfortunately.

"I see. Fortunately, Will agreed to co-host with me tonight," he says diplomatically, stepping back into his home and inviting her in with a genteel wave of his hand. "He will be here soon, but your company is, of course, always welcome." With restrictions.

This … does not bode well. Will is going to be here any minute only to see he is not the first to arrive like he will no doubt be expecting. Even worse, it will be *Alana* who is interrupting their time together. He will be understandably upset. Fire will bloom in his eyes and Hannibal will once again fall to his knees and repent at the feet of his god when all is said and done.

He can't wait.

"Oh," she seems to have not expected that answer, brow furrowing. "He did? Color me surprised," she says playfully. Hannibal smiles again since it would be impolite to let the joke fall flat.

"He's been very supportive and accommodating of my social habits," Hannibal replies. He holds out his hands. "May I take your coat?"

Alana smiles and says, "Yes, thank you," and slides out of the chic garment gracefully. She hands it over to Hannibal who puts it in the freshly emptied coat closet. "I hope I'm not overstepping?" she asks, closing the door behind her.

She is, but Hannibal, of course, would never outwardly say. "Nonsense. Friends are always welcome in my kitchen," Hannibal says dutifully. "May I get you a glass of wine?"

Oh, this *certainly* does not bode well.

He knows she will say no and ask for something else and he knows exactly what she will ask for. He feels gleeful, waiting, as he heads back into his bustling kitchen with Alana in tow. She is making up for her earlier disappointment with the amusement she is now providing him.

She laughs gently. "I think I'll take a glass of beer, actually."

Hannibal stills, a giddy feeling rising in his chest. It has wings that beat a frenetic rhythm like those of a hummingbird against his ribcage. It's thrilling. "I'm afraid I had to throw it out."

He can practically feel her frown as he goes to retrieve a wine glass for her. She stands away from the business of his staff, hands resting comfortably by her sides. "That's a shame. It was delicious. Was there something wrong with it?"

Hannibal ponders how he can respond to the situation with great care.

He could say that, yes, the batch wasn't up to his standards and, as a result, he lost faith in his abilities and threw out the brewing kit. He would need to twist his words a certain way for it to be believable – Hannibal rarely gives up on something because of a single failure and Alana knows him well enough to understand this. So long as he adds an air of disgruntlement, it would be believable and would have the added benefit of avoiding social catastrophe.

Hannibal wants catastrophe. He wants it badly.

That giddy feeling from before only grows stronger as he considers the possibility of honesty. It would openly stake Will's claim on him, and would portray his acceptance of that claim. It would showcase his belonging to Will in the eyes of someone who had doubted his partner and doubted Hannibal's affections and nothing would make him happier.

Will is going to be cross with him when he finds out. Hannibal is counting on it. Will enjoys his tendency towards submission and Hannibal genuinely enjoys showing it to him, giving it to him. Still, at the front of his mind, are images and sensations of Will holding his head still as he fucked into his mouth. It had been beautiful and Hannibal had been deliciously overcome. Atonement, he had called it.

He wants that again.

Mind made up, he doesn't mince his words as he pours Alana a glass of Malbec. "Not as such. Will made me throw it out." He states it nonchalantly, as if he's commenting on the weather. His gaze peers up to watch her reaction.

The silence that rings out in his kitchen is deafening.

Some of the staff he hired for the event had apparently been eavesdropping instead of focusing on their tasks. They glance up from their work stations with surprised eyes, shifting their attention back and forth between their temporary head chef and his guest as they wait with baited breath for her response.

He doesn't mind the audience. Just more people to know that Will's claim has been staked.

Alana's blue eyes are positively glacial. "He did?" she asks coolly. Hannibal tries to smother the shark's smile threatening to overtake his features as he hands her the half full glass of Malbec.

"He did," he confirms, clinking his glass to her own unresponsive glass in a toast and taking a sip. He lets the full bodied, slightly sweet flavors float around his mouth before swallowing. Alana stares at him incredulously, hints of anger coloring her cheeks. "Will told me he informed you that our relationship has taken a turn for the romantic and the topic came up. He is a jealous lover, I'm afraid."

Alana is struck speechless, mouth parting to emit words, but nothing comes out. Her glass of wine tilts, threatening to spill.

The giddy feeling from before has refused to dissipate and is now invading Hannibal's limbs, making them feel light and tingly. He hasn't felt this much emotional sensation in ages, before Will. Even though he isn't here, the man inspires so much feeling in him, he could cry for it.

Her eyes flick back and forth between his, trying to find the joke Hannibal isn't telling. When she sees how serious he is, a disbelieving laugh leaves her painted lips.

"Hannibal, that's ridiculous. He can't tell you what to do," Alana states firmly, a deep frown marring her features.

Oh, how wrong she is. Hannibal thinks of the times Will has done exactly that. Hannibal, prostrate before him, with Will ordering him to undo his pants and suck him through his boxers. Will above him, rubbing his groin on Hannibal's face, telling him to suck his cock, that he wishes to have it in Hannibal's mouth when he comes. Will, blue eyes fierce and fiery, curls wild about his head. Hannibal's God.

An artificial sigh leaves his lips as he goes back to his task of preparing for the party, turning on his gas range and melting butter over the stove for the roux. Dr. Bloom has not taken a single sip of her wine. "He can if I let him. I assure you, he would ask nothing of me that would be out of my bounds to give and, if he did, I would tell him."

This only incenses her further. "So him telling you to stop brewing beer for me is within your bounds?"

He summons an expression of confusion. "Of course."

"Do you hear how you sound?" she asks, voice pitched higher than usual, but still quiet so the staff doesn't overhear. He's sure their ears are trained anyways. "How would you respond if a patient said something like this to you?"

Hannibal makes like he's thinking about it, which he's not. He's thinking about how much flour he should add, if he needs it thick or on the thinner side. "I suppose it would depend on their response to the stressor, if it could be called such. Some people function well within a relationship built on atypically rigorous structure, so long as it is well discussed beforehand."

"You mean codependency."

Hannibal doesn't stop what he's doing. "Codependency is an unbalanced relationship. Mine and Will's is perfectly balanced and well discussed. I fear speaking more of it would invade our privacy, but I can assure you, it is healthy."

She comes closer to his work station and sets her untouched glass down out of Hannibal's way. He glances at it quickly, then back to his roux as he stirs in the sifted flour. On the thicker side, he thinks. "Hannibal, him telling you to throw out beer you made for me is not *healthy* . It's incredibly unhealthy, actually."

"Not if I'm alright with it."

“No,” Alana shakes her head. “That makes you just as unhealthy.” She breathes an angry exhale through her nose. Hannibal is nearly shaking with the anticipation of Will’s arrival to the scene. “How could you be okay with this?” she asks. Her voice is softer now as if all the anger has left her. Her eyes are pleading, her lips downturned.

Human emotions have always been Hannibal’s strong suit. You have to know something well to manipulate it. There is, however, a difference between knowledge of them and practical application.

In a medical setting, he excels. In a personal setting, he tends to … question. Sometimes he even struggles with Will’s, but he’d like to think he’s gotten better.

He knows he should comfort her, tell her that perhaps it is wrong, perhaps he should buy another kit and brew another batch for her. It would be the expected response. The healthy response.

But it would also show imbalance where none exists. And even if it did, he simply doesn’t feel the need to pander to her emotions.

Hannibal half shrugs. “He is my partner. I will not do something that makes him uncomfortable,” he says, and it feels like explanation enough for how true it is. The only opinion he cares about is Will’s, nothing else matters. If Alana disagrees with his decision, then he will show her out.

“Has he asked you not to be friends with me?” she asks hesitantly, crossing her arms over her chest.

“He asked me to keep it professional,” Hannibal supplies without elucidating.

“And you disagreed to that, at least, right?”

Hannibal continues stirring. “No. I did not.”

Alana turns her face away, but Hannibal can see her eyes shining. She is a passionate woman, but polite enough to reign in her full fury. She takes a deep breath to settle herself. Hannibal glances at his timepiece. Will should be arriving in a few minutes.

“You’ve already pulled back from me, Hannibal. Don’t think I haven’t noticed,” Alana says, still not looking at him. “You used to bring me lunch, you used to message me every day, we used to prepare meals together in this very kitchen. You barely even say my name anymore.”

Hannibal may be indifferent to human emotions, but he is excellent at picking them up. He can sense her sadness, the sting of rejection. He does admit to himself that he should have been more clear and up front with her about staying friends instead of petering off gradually like he did. It would have been simpler than this. Regardless, he is unaffected by her sadness. Unfortunately, he knows it would reflect badly upon him if he didn’t make a show of trying to salvage their friendship.

“I fell in love with him rather quickly,” he says, transferring the roux which is now finished for the béchamel sauce into a holding dish. He swipes the edges once he’s done pouring and brings it to his mouth for one last taste. It’s perfect. “I lost interest in anyone else,” he replies honestly.

That gives her pause. She licks her lips and asks, softly, “Were you interested in me?”

Rude. She had told Will in no uncertain terms that Hannibal had been courting her and she hadn’t even been sure? Hannibal still doesn’t understand her motivations for such a declaration. Will had asked him not to mention anything, but he feels compelled to find out on both their behalf's.

He shouldn’t say it. Will had asked him specifically not to. Hannibal had assured him he wouldn’t.

But he hadn’t promised.

“It is my understanding that that is what you told our dear Will,” he admonishes gently.

Her eyes widen the slightest bit, but she’s almost as good as Hannibal at pulling herself back together. Her face smoothes out within an instant. The look she gives Hannibal is an odd mixture of quiet arrogance and unsurety. “I was sure then. I’m not so sure now.”

He decides for honesty again, as much as he can, given the circumstances of his *interest.* “I was interested in getting closer, yes,” he says carefully. She needn’t know that his interest in her was purely for his own personal gains. “But, as I said, he garnered my attention in its entirety.”

“So you’re no longer my friend, then?”

“Of course I am still your friend, Alana.”

“Are we professional, or are we friends? We can’t be both.”

“Why not? I think he was more meaning to keep a sense of propriety in you and I’s interactions. That is all. I don’t think it's too much to ask.”

“Hannibal, this is madness. You can’t possibly be okay with this. He’s controlling you. He isn’t stable,” her voice is rising in octaves and Hannibal has half a mind to move her to the foyer before she truly makes a scene. “Entering into this relationship was already a bad idea, and now you’re ignoring the red flags.”

Hannibal dips his head to show her that he’s listening. “I understand your concerns, but I don’t share them. Will is remarkably stable. He isn’t asking me to do away with every friendship I have.”

“Just mine. He feels threatened by me.”

Hannibal softly tsks. “That is not my opinion to give, it would be Will’s. And in any case, I think he has a right to feel discomfort with our closeness, considering our history and the

conversation you and Will had the other day."

Her face falls. "I still can't believe he told you about that." she says, resigned. "Honestly, I was hoping he wouldn't."

"We are not in the business of hiding things from one another. He was upset. I will always do everything in my power to ease his concerns."

She sighs and shifts on her feet. "Whatever you want to call it, this is mutual codependency, Hannibal. You must recognize that. I can't be okay with this. I've known you far longer than he has. I'm surprised he told you to keep it professional with me, but I'm even more surprised that you would agree to it. I thought our friendship meant more to you than that."

"Our friendship is important to me," he argues nonchalantly, "but my relationship with Will is more important, yes. It's not uncommon for romantic partners to prioritize each other."

"That doesn't make it healthy."

"It doesn't make it unhealthy, either."

He has had just about enough of her judgment. He's about to tell her so when a key enters the bolt, opening the door. Immediately, he smells Will's scent waft through to his kitchen and something else, something fresh and lovely.

"Hey, babe," Will calls out, setting his keys down with a clink next to Hannibal's on the stand by the door. "Sorry I'm a little late, I got you something." His honey baritone voice settles into Hannibal's bones. When he shuts the door behind himself and walks into the kitchen, he pauses, looking between a Hannibal who is barely containing his glee and an Alana who looks furious.

Will looks … beautiful, wearing a dark turtleneck and fashionable coat. His trousers are well fitted, clinging to his shape like they were made for him and his curls are slicked back against his head with one rebellious curl escaping to rest on his forehead. In his hands is a lovely bouquet: red roses and blue hydrangeas. Love and family, passion and unity. His breath falters.

Hannibal clears his throat, overcome for seeing him after so many days. "Never apologize. I'm just glad you're here." Even Hannibal can detect the slight change in his tone now that he's speaking with his beloved; his cadence softer, deeper. He walks over to him and kisses him softly on the mouth. "Thank you for the flowers. They're lovely."

Will smiles and it is the one that is reserved only for him: soft and sweet, his eyes glowing with it. "Missed you."

"And I you, mylimasis."

Will's warm eyes turn cool when he turns his gaze to Alana. "Alana, good to see you," he says cordially.

Hannibal can see the indecision on Alana's face; should she also be cordial, or keep with the theme of honesty.

Hannibal waits for her to decide, taking his flowers from Will's hands with a kiss to his forehead and going to find a vase so he can display them for all to see. They won't match with his theme for tonight, but it's all the better for it – a love that stands out.

Will's eyes don't leave Alana's. His icy blue eyes are trained on her confidently, and Hannibal is proud to see it.

He listens eagerly for their conversation, as eager as his nosy staff.

She doesn't even properly greet him before she begins. Hannibal's chest feels fluttery with nerves and delight. He sniffs the bouquet his love had brought him as he listens.

"You told him to throw out my beer," she states angrily, not even bothering to keep her voice down anymore.

Will doesn't even wince. "Perhaps we should talk about this somewhere else," he replies, glancing at the dressed up staff in Hannibal's kitchen, their black and white uniforms giving an air of professionalism they don't adhere to.

Alana clasps her hands in front of her, posture easy. Hannibal knows a mask when he sees one and mentally applauds her etiquette. "I think if you have nothing to be ashamed of, we can talk about it here."

Hannibal looks between them as they stare the other down and sighs to himself. Perhaps now he should intervene. It pains him to do so, but Will's fist is clenched and the corner of his lip is lifted in a small snarl. As much as Alana's distress had amused him, Will's does not.

"Alright," Will agrees. "Yes, I did." He doesn't offer any more explanation than that.

Hannibal walks over to where the pair are glowering at each other and puts a hand on Will's shoulder. He directs his gaze to Alana who is staring at him expectantly. What she expects him to do is anyone's guess. "Alana, please. It has already been done and I would do it again if he asked. I truly didn't think you would mind so much. I apologize if I've upset you."

"You haven't," she says. She looks back at Will who is trying not to appear pleased. "He has."

"Be that as it may, I have staff that need to concentrate and guests to prepare for. This conversation will need to take place at another time."

"No, I think I'm done with this conversation," Alana sighs. "I think I'm going to go."

"Alana –" Hannibal tries, but she's already walking back towards the foyer where her coat waits. Hannibal looks over at Will who is watching her disinterestedly. "If that is what you truly wish," he says to her back. Problem solved, then.

Will follows her. Hannibal follows Will with a moue of displeasure. He really does need to get back to work.

As Alana is putting on her coat, she turns to Will and shakes her head at him. “I hope you’re happy. You just cost Hannibal a friend.” And with that, she leaves.

Will’s mask of indifference drops the moment the door closes behind her with a soft click. Hannibal walks over to comfort him, but Will holds up his hand. Hannibal stops.

“What did you tell her?”

Hannibal licks his bottom lip. “She asked for a glass of beer. I told her I threw it out. I told her that you asked me to.”

Will nods, looking down at his boots, shiny and new looking. Hannibal likes them. “What else?”

“She asked me if I was ever interested in her. I felt compelled to remind her that she had told you I was. I was curious as to her motivations in saying such a thing when I had already told you everything.”

Will turns his eyes to him. The rest of his face is flat, but his eyes are *livid.* “Go after her.”

Hannibal hesitates. Alana had made her choice and Hannibal was loath to go after anyone save the man in front of him. He does not chase, he hunts. It’s not in his nature, nor his desire, to give.

Will senses his hesitation and turns his body to fully face Hannibal, opening the door blindly behind him. “Go after her,” he repeats firmly. Hannibal can tell that Will is not going to repeat himself a third time.

“Yes, Will,” he says softly, confused – hadn’t he done what Will had wanted? – heeding his command as he walks out of the door.

Alana has just shut the door to her Prius and is turning the engine over when Hannibal knocks on her window. She stares at him for a second, maybe two, before she rolls it down. She doesn’t say anything.

He could tell her that Will asked him to bring her back inside, make amends, but he thinks that’s not what Will wants.

“I wish you wouldn’t go,” he says instead of the truth. “Our friendship need not change, Alana. I regret that I’ve caused you any distress. Please. Come back inside.”

She continues staring at him without saying anything, but Hannibal holds her gaze and keeps himself patient. He is falling behind on his schedule, but Will had wanted him to do this, so he shall.

Alana sighs and her shoulders slump slightly as her glare lessens. “I’m going to go buy a case of beer. After your guests leave, you, me, and Will are going to sit down like adults and talk.”

That sounds perfectly reasonable, except that he was greatly looking forward to having Will alone. He briefly laments his loss. He can't have that.

"There is nothing to discuss," he states carefully. "Will set boundaries and I will respect them. He is not controlling me, he has no desire to take something I'm not willing to give him. He agreed to co-host knowing he would have to socialize with so many of my acquaintances and he is fully supportive of my ventures. He is the best thing that's ever happened to me and I will always put him first. When I asked him if he wanted me to discontinue our friendship, Alana, he was adamant that I keep it. You should give him more credit than that. I know it was a shock to you, and I fully understand that, but this is beneath you. We cannot all have Will's empathy, but please try to understand."

Alana still hasn't said anything. Hannibal is about to give up and go back inside, tell Will he tried, when she exhales long and slow. "You're right. You're right. I'm sorry I made a fuss. In front of your staff, no less."

"Do not worry about them. Will and I are both worried about you," he lies. He's only worried about Will and the reasoning for him coming out here to retrieve her. Had he miscalculated?

She nods, looking out of her front window, not meeting Hannibal's gaze anymore. "I was attracted to both of you, friends with both of you, and now it feels like I've been shut out by both of you."

"These new boundaries may take some getting used to, but we will all adjust."

"Do you need to adjust? Does Will? Or just me?"

"Perhaps just you," Hannibal says after a pause, as kindly as he can, genuinely at a loss for what to say. It seems rude to say it, but Alana needs the truth, even if she doesn't like it.

"What boundaries has he set? You know, so I can get used to them."

Hannibal leans against her car so he can talk more easily with her. "He doesn't feel comfortable with us being alone together, and he wants me to stop doing the things I was doing when I was courting you. That's all. Even then, I think it's temporary until he sees that he can trust us both. He has not had the easiest life."

"No, he hasn't," she agrees. "I'm sorry for what I said about him."

"I am not the one you should be apologizing to, Alana."

She sighs. "I know. I'm going to go get my beer. I'll come right back."

Hannibal gives her his best smile. "We eagerly await your return. Please, let yourself in when you come back."

With that, he leans off her car and waves at her, and walks back to his front porch where he goes inside. Will is waiting for him with curious eyes. When he hears her quiet car take off, he frowns.

“She is going to buy beer, that is all. She will be back.”

Will sucks his lips between his teeth and nods, smoothing down his black jacket. “Okay.”

“Will … I must admit, I’m a bit confused.”

“Regarding?”

“I thought her leaving is what you wanted?”

The look Will gives him as he takes slow, menacing steps towards him has Hannibal’s heart starting to beat faster. He looks dangerous.

“I wanted boundaries, not for you to make a spectacle for your own amusement,” he says lowly, his voice sharp.

Hannibal swallows. Of course Will would see right through him. He was a fool to think this wouldn’t happen. He had only wanted to make Will angry again so that he may turn that anger into another scene of what happened earlier in the week: Hannibal on his knees, working for forgiveness. It had been veneration of the highest order, causing sensations and feelings within Hannibal that he never thought he could experience. He was addicted after only a taste.

And he had selfishly not thought of the consequences in order to get what he wanted.

Already, Will’s anger is causing his groin to tighten. Already, he is eager to once again drop to his knees. The sensations from that night, still unfamiliar in their hold, are beginning to taint his blood with their hot fingers. His chest is tight, his belly fluttering, his extremities feel heavy. He hadn’t known then that this is what regret felt like, too unfamiliar with the concept to recognize such a common emotion, but he recognizes it now.

The only way to have this feeling leave him, as curious and extraordinary as it is, is to atone. Will must sense this for what he says next.

“No atonement. I was going to ask you to fuck my ass tonight, but you don’t deserve that.”

Hannibal’s heart stops, drops into his stomach. “Will –”

“No,” he says firmly. “You can’t do shit like this and expect me to reward you. You can’t make me upset just so you can get what you want.” Will’s face is still hard even after he’s finished speaking, but after a while it softens. He walks up to Hannibal, but doesn’t touch him. Hannibal wants his touch so badly. “You don’t have to do all that shit with me, Hannibal. If you want something, all you have to do is ask.”

Hannibal licks his lips. He feels … nervous, vulnerable. “That is not something I’m used to.”

A strange look passes over Will’s face. Hannibal can’t decipher it. “I know,” he says gently, “but that doesn’t make it any less true. I’m not going to ask you to change who you are, but I will ask you to treat me better than that. Don’t play with me. I’m your partner, not your toy.”

“I never saw you as a toy, and I certainly don’t now,” Hannibal argues, offended.

Will just looks at him, into him, straight through him. Hannibal can feel his brow wrinkle between his own eyes as he tries to understand what it is Will is seeing.

“Hannibal. You knew I was sick.”

Hannibal’s blood runs cold, icy fingers that grip his throat. “Yes, that’s why I took you to see Dr. Sutcliffe,” he evades.

Will shakes his head. “No. Before that. When you smelled me in your office, you knew. You asked me if my headaches were getting worse. You blamed it on my aftershave,” Will says, voice calm and sure, eyes flicking back and forth between Hannibal’s. “You knew.”

Hannibal’s jaw clenches. He swallows thickly. His heart is going a mile a minute.

He is scared.

“You wanted me to burn. You were curious what would come to the surface,” Will lists off, eyes unwavering in their crystalline blue intensity. “You were trying to blind me to something, like you were going to do to Alana, and my illness was the perfect way to do it because you knew I’d eventually see. Only you didn’t want to use me. No. You wanted an equal. If I had died, you would have had nothing.”

Hannibal’s eyes are stinging. He reaches out to Will, but he pulls away. Strangely, he doesn’t appear angry. Will’s face is a blank mask that Hannibal can’t see through even though he stands there before the younger man feeling flayed alive.

He doesn’t know what to say. He doesn’t want to lie, not anymore, hasn’t for a long time. It’s been torture keeping certain facts to himself, but it never feels like the right time. Will there ever be a right time?

He wants to ask Will when he found out, if he’s going to leave him. He’s so close to the truth. Hannibal’s bones shake within the meat of his trembling muscles. His nerves are begging him to render and tear, to protect himself, but he refuses to harm a single, beautiful hair on Will’s perfect head.

Will is right. If he dies, Hannibal has nothing.

“Will.” He struggles to say even his name, so stiff is his throat with trepidation. “You’re right. About everything.” This night is going to hell.

His blue eyes flash threateningly. “Oh, I know I am. And we are going to talk about it later. For now, you’re going to pour me a whiskey, neat, and tell me what I can do to help as your co-host. We’re going to act like everything is fine and when Alana comes back, you’re going to apologize to her. We both are. But we are having a serious discussion tonight on the merits of this relationship.”

Hannibal winces back like he’s been slapped. “Will, please. I will explain everything, but please don’t – ” *Don’t leave me* goes unsaid, but he knows Will hears it. His desperation feels

disgusting to him, but the feeling won't leave him.

A desperate thrumming is taking over his body. His breathing is growing labored, quick little gasps that don't give his lungs enough oxygen. Will is going to leave him, and he has no one to blame but himself.

He played with fire, literally, and they both were burned by his careless, selfish mistake.

He has only ever begged once in his life before Will Graham, when his sister was being taken away, when Mischa had turned to him screaming for help and Hannibal had been helpless, weak and starving and chained.

He's begging now. He wants to hate himself for it, but the only emotion he can muster right now is unmitigated fear of losing Will. The only person besides his darling Mischa who he ever cared about. So he begs.

"Please stay."

"I told you I'm not leaving, Hannibal. I'm going to co-host with you. I'm here.

"I meant after," Hannibal clarifies, voice tinged with ugly desperation. "I can't lose you."

"You almost did."

"I wouldn't have let it go so far," he argues.

Will's eyes scorch him down to the bone. "You don't control illness. You don't control what happens. You may think that you do, but I'm here to tell you that you're not God."

Will walks closer suddenly, getting into his personal space. "Go to the kitchen, make me that drink, and tell me what you need me to do. We'll discuss if I'm leaving or not after, but it will be my choice."

Hannibal can feel a tear slip down his cheek, followed by another. Will gently reaches up and brushes them away, brings the pad of his thumb to his mouth for a taste. Hannibal feels unmoored, lost.

He does as Will says.

Hannibal sniffs and wipes his face clean with his hand once he has privacy at the bar, pouring Will his whiskey, top shelf brand. He can't believe he has lost control of the situation like this. He can't believe Will knows and wonders how long he's known. Wonders what more he knows, if anything.

It won't be long, now, before he figures out the rest. Hannibal can only wait. Usually, he's good at waiting. Now, he isn't sure he can. Tonight will be the sweetest torture as he waits hours for Will's conclusion.

He neats the glass, then stares into its amber depths as if it holds any answers. He's barely kissed Will tonight. He may never get the chance to again. The thought brings more

traitorous tears to his eyes and he angrily wipes them away.

Will had to have known this information for some time and still, he brought him flowers, called him *babe* knowing Alana was present. There has to be some hope, Hannibal will die if there isn't. Perhaps not all is lost. Perhaps Hannibal will just need to sing for his supper for once in his life. He will do anything for Will, to keep him.

Face cleaned up and whiskey poured, Hannibal makes his way back into the kitchen where he sees Will with his jacket off, the tight turtleneck showcasing all of his beautiful muscles and dips, and Hannibal's mouth goes dry when he pushes his sleeves up to reveal his strong forearms.

He sets his whiskey down for him. Will stares at him while he takes a sip.

He sighs with satisfaction after he swallows. Hannibal watches his throat, feeling unable to meet his eyes.

"I already have the table set," Hannibal says, "but I have fallen behind on my prep work. I will need your help mincing some herbs so that I may start on the hors d'oeuvres."

"Alright," Will agrees with an easy smile. Hannibal can't tell if it's plastic or real. Will's face is shuttered off from him.

"Do you know how to mince?"

Will shoots him a withering glare. "I know how to mince."

"Alright." Hannibal brings him the sage, parsley, rosemary, and nutmeg. "The sage will need to be bundled with the rosemary into seven individual sprigs and the parsley will need mincing. With the nutmeg, you will need to grate it finely."

"I can do that."

Hannibal nods, knowing Will is more than capable. "Alright, then," he says unsurely. He doesn't want to leave Will's side, feeling uncharacteristically clingy, but he goes back to his work station and starts sculpting roses out of thinly sliced prosciutto.

Will glances up from his work on occasion and Hannibal can feel his gaze every time. It burns holes into his very being. It sets his blood to fire and ice.

They continue to work to the sounds of Bach playing in the background. No more words are said.

Hannibal tries not to let his fear of the inevitable distract him. It doesn't work.

A few minutes pass by before the sound of the door opening sings through the house. Alana comes into the kitchen with a pack of craft beer and puts a few bottles into the fridge. She looks to have cleared her head.

She comes to stand by Will, and he is surprisingly okay with it. She brings a seat over so she can sit and watch after confirming with Hannibal that there's no need for her to do anything but enjoy herself.

He bites his lip. He needs to apologize.

"Alana," he starts, and then tapers off. He can feel Hannibal's eyes on him. "I'm sorry. If we hurt you. If I did."

"I might have overreacted a little," she says lightly. Will doesn't think she did. He's fully cognizant of what his behavior says about him, and what Hannibal's indulgence says about *him*. "It's okay. Really."

"You're not going to have a beer?" he asks, trying to make conversation.

"I like mine ice cold," she replies with a friendly smile, a genuine smile. Will smiles back.

An hour passes by in mostly silence aside from the soft commands that come from Hannibal to him and his crew of sous chefs. Will works diligently while Alana watches. He fully comprehends Hannibal's standards after having been privy to so many dinners with the man. This isn't his first time helping him cook, after all. He knows what he's doing and he works quickly, completing one task after another.

He has to keep reminding himself of that: he knows what he's doing.

It had been necessary for him to tell Hannibal of what he knew. He figures doing it in stages is better than coming out with it all at once. He wants Hannibal to stew a little. He's known about this for days, having so much time alone to think, and think, and *think*.

He has no intention of actually leaving him, but he wants the older man to sweat a little. Teach him to ever fuck with Will again.

Hannibal knew he was sick. Hannibal was trying to bring something out in him, but he already knew that part. Hannibal wanted an equal, but an equal he could manipulate for his own safety. He couldn't very well have Will run off and tell the authorities.

No. Hannibal wanted him to kill so that he could use that to bind them together. He needed a puppet he could control, because without control, Hannibal feels lost. Somewhere along the way – according to Hannibal, when he killed Budge – he realized he couldn't go on like that in regards to Will.

After Tobias, when you walked into my office, alive, it struck me that my feelings for you were not merely what I had thought them to be.

My whole world changed, as did my priorities.

Will remembers that particular conversation verbatim. Hannibal hadn't been lying to him, just shielding some of the truth. Hannibal had toyed with him, but then realized that Will was no puppet. Realized that Will held his own strings.

Hannibal realized that Will was the love of his life.

Will wasn't angry. Not anymore. He had been laying in bed when the final pieces came together, and he had almost called him, but he refrained. He had formed a plan instead. Hannibal's little tiff with Alana had given him the perfect opening for him to move his pawn.

He couldn't change Hannibal's nature, didn't want to. What happened in the past is in the past, and Will forgives him for all of it. He just can't let Hannibal know that yet.

The next thirty minutes is a blur. Hannibal and his staff complete all the food and Hannibal comes over to him when all is done.

His hands are fidgeting by his sides, only slightly, but enough for Will to see the miniscule ticks of his fingers. "I'm going to go get changed. I'll be right back. The first of the guests should be arriving soon," he tells him. Will nods and rolls his sleeves back down, donning his jacket and doing up the button.

Within the next ten minutes, the doorbell rings. Will goes to the door and is greeted by an older couple, a man and a woman. He wears a plain blue tux with a white shirt and she wears every jewel this side of Baltimore on her bony fingers. Will bites down any scathing remarks, smiles pleasantly, and welcomes them inside.

The older woman smiles at him, looking him up and down. "And who might you be?"

"Will Graham, I'm Hannibal's partner," he states proudly as he holds his hand out. She places hers delicately into his waiting palm and he brings it up for a kiss. "Pleasure to meet you."

"Elena Komeda. The pleasure is all mine, dear." There's a mischievous twinkle in her eye that has Will nearly gulping. "You seem quite a deal younger than Hannibal. Scandalous."

He doesn't quite know how to respond to that, so he opts for an awkward chuckle and something flirtatious. "Oh, he keeps up with me just fine," he winks. It's brazen, and not something he would ever say in a normal situation, but this is not a normal situation. He has a part to play and an image to keep up for these people and he isn't about to make Hannibal regret making him his co-host.

She laughs, delighted, and leans in conspiratorially. "With a face like that, I bet he does," she mock whispers.

After gathering himself from reacting outwardly to such a lascivious comment, Will remembers his manners and takes their coats. They chat for a few more minutes about what they do for a living and other incessant blather before the doorbell rings again, signaling more guests.

The face he opens the door to is cool and collected, platinum blonde hair and ice blue eyes. She's beautiful, and has an air of muted emotion around her.

She speaks before Will can. "You must be Will Graham."

He beckons her inside. "I am. You've heard of me, but I'm afraid I don't know who you are."

"Bedelia Du Maurier. Pleasure." And then she hands him her coat.

"May I ask how you know of me?" Will asks.

She gives him a sharp smile. "You are quite the topic of conversation in psychiatric circles." Oh great, another shrink. "And Hannibal talks quite a bit about you."

Oh.

Will smiles back, but it feels stilted. "I see. Well, it's a pleasure to meet you. There's champagne in the parlor and some small bites. Please, come inside and enjoy."

She gives him a long stare before she is off. Will has the feeling she was sizing him up.

An estimated twenty minutes pass, by Will's guess, as he greets people at the door and takes their coats with his best smile. He mingles with them while wait staff start to hand out flutes of champagne. It's all surface level conversation that lasts no more than three minutes a person as he makes the usual polite enquiries: how do you know Hannibal? How are you finding the champagne? Is there anything I can get for you? Will has to explain roughly six times how he and Hannibal know each other and that they are an item.

Everyone Will talks to is surprised that Hannibal is with anyone at all. Apparently, he rarely dates, and when he does, it lasts no more than a few outings. Will's ire from earlier dissipates slightly with the knowledge, settling the possessive beast that has to share him with so many people tonight.

All in all, Will is proud of himself. As he gazes out into the parlor watching Hannibal's guests, *their* guests, chat and laugh away, sipping on their drinks and enjoying themselves, Will lets out a quiet breath of relief. He makes his way back out to the sharks, but a knock at the door stops him.

He looks around the room. Jack and Bella were invited, and they are not present yet. Meaning the people at the door will likely be them.

Will takes a fortifying breath and answers the door with the smile he's worn for everyone else.

Jack is looking at Bella when Will opens the door. When he turns, expecting Hannibal, or maybe even Alana, he does a double take at seeing Will instead. Will ushers them inside, feigning ignorance at Jack's bewildered stare.

Bella greets him with a firm handshake and he takes her coat. Jack still hasn't said a word.

“Mr. Graham. Lovely to see you again,” Bella says.

Will smiles at her. “Please, call me Will.”

“In that case, please call me Bella.”

Will turns to Jack. “May I take your coat, Jack?”

Without looking away from Will as if he were a ghost, Jack shrugs out of his coat and hands it blindly to him. “What are you doing here?”

Will has to bite back his snark. “I was invited. I’m co-hosting with Hannibal.”

“That’s nice,” Bella comments. “He does so much, I’m sure he appreciates the help.”

“He’s always managed fine without me. He should be down soon,” Will responds. “Let me get you a glass of champagne.”

Will flags down one of the three waiters and plucks a flute from the silver serving tray, handing it to her by the stem. She takes it gratefully and throws a knowing look at her husband who is still staring at Will.

“Will, he’s your psychiatrist. Is it really appropriate for you to be here?” Jack asks.

There’s no one around, which is a bummer. He was hoping with people close by, he’d cause less of a commotion, but no such luck. Will is going to have to break the news to him here and now with only his wife as their witness.

“Hannibal and I are seeing each other, Jack –”

“ – Will –”

“And before you say anything other than ‘congratulations’ or ‘took you long enough’ please note that I will not be taking questions or arguing on the nature of my personal life,” Will finishes sternly. He keeps his eyes trained on Jack’s chin and his face smooth of any anxious expressions that long to slip out at the confrontation.

“Will, he’s your therapist. You work together.”

“I’m not arguing with you, Jack.”

Bella is about to intervene when Jack holds a hand up to her. Will wants to smack it away. “I’m not arguing, I’m concerned.”

“What is everyone so concerned about? I know what I’m doing and it’s my right to do it. Hannibal and I are together and that’s that,” Will says with a note of finality. “Now, can I get you a drink?”

He sighs heavily, glowering at Will who does nothing but raise his eyebrows expectantly. “This conversation isn’t over, Will.”

“And what conversation would that be?” comes a voice from behind them, husky and accented. Will could faint for how relieved he is to hear that voice.

Jack turns to look at the doctor. “The one where you and Will have crossed ethical boundaries.”

Hannibal tuts at him and Will has to hide his smirk at Hannibal’s politely condescending tone. “Jack, I believe those boundaries were crossed when you sought my notes on Will. Private notes that should have been protected.”

“You did what?” Bella exclaims, looking at her husband with a grim expression.

“It wasn’t like they were having actual sessions,” he tells her, “they were unofficial conversations.”

Will allows his quiet smirk to bleed through his vindicated tone. “So we’re agreed; he’s not my therapist?”

Jack understands in that moment, as his brow draws in and his lips thin into a thin line, that he is outnumbered three to one. He sighs quietly, but Will can see that he’s fuming. What he doesn’t understand is why.

“What’s the real reason this bothers you so much?” Will decides to ask outright. Hannibal looks like he, too, is curious about that himself.

“Yes, what does bother you, Jack?” Bella asks knowingly. “I think they make for a lovely couple.”

“Thank you, Bella,” Hannibal says graciously. “Will has made me unbelievably happy.”

Hannibal looks at Jack as he says it, gaze pointed. Jack nods his head. “Congratulations to the happy couple,” he offers somewhat sarcastically. Will is pleased with it, nonetheless.

“Why thank you, Jack,” Hannibal responds with a smile so plastic you could make transactions with it. “Please, enjoy the party. More hors d'oeuvres are about to be brought out.”

After the couple has left the foyer and made their way to the parlor, Hannibal turns smoothly to face Will directly. “That went well,” he says flatly.

Will chuckles. “Could have gone worse. Thanks for finally showing up.”

“The host is never late to his own party,” Hannibal says. He seems different, but not in the way Will was expecting. He looks like at any minute, Will is going to storm out; the looks of a man who has everything to lose. His shoulders are set more rigidly than his usual correct posture allows and his face is shuttered, unreadable. Unreadable to anyone but Will.

“The co-host will agree to disagree.”

Hannibal leans in slightly, and then pauses, searching Will's eyes for permission. Will, jealous thing that he is, wants everyone to see what they are about to do, but appreciates that Hannibal is trying not to make him uncomfortable.

Will leans away from him. He and Hannibal have much to talk about, and Hannibal still has some explaining to do. He needs to hold tightly to his mask of indifference lest it shatter at the demure and disappointed look in Hannibal's eyes.

He is supposed to be playing like he's mad at him. A mad Will wouldn't want a kiss, not right now.

Hannibal accepts his refusal with a slight nod, his face hardening. Will can tell it's not out of anger, but out of rejection. "I should go see to our guests."

"Yes," Will agrees. "They've been expecting you. I'll be out in a minute."

Hannibal gives another curt nod, and wanders off, graceful in his steps. Will watches from a distance as his expression goes from the pained look of a few seconds ago to something altogether different and appropriate for the happy festivities.

Alana approaches him from the kitchen holding a cold beer bottle by the neck, her heels clicking on the hardwood of Hannibal's home. "Everything alright?"

The thought of sharing something personal with her still smarts, so he lies through his teeth. "Everything's good. Just need a breather from all the gossip."

"I was surprised when Hannibal told me you were co-hosting. This doesn't really seem like your style."

"It's not. The things we do for love, though, right?" he smiles and hopes it doesn't look as forced as it feels.

Judging by her gentling expression, he fails. "Are we okay, Will?" The question is asked softly, hesitantly. She takes a sip of her beer. Will has no drink because he needs to be on his best behavior. He'll have another drink when everyone has settled in.

"Are we?"

"I asked you first."

Will turns away from her intense gaze and looks out at the crowd. "I don't expect you to be okay with what I've asked of him. I don't need you to be."

"I understand that boundaries have been placed. I may not like or agree with them, but I will respect them." She debates for a minute on something, her eyes flash with it, her mouth twitching. "I'll tell you what I told him. I had feelings for both of you, and now both of you are together. Intensely together. It's an odd position to be in and I didn't handle it well."

Will dips his head, eyes tracing the wood patterns on the floor. "And I didn't handle my jealousy well."

“No, you didn’t.”

“I’m not going to apologize again.”

“I don’t expect you to, but I do expect you to know that no one can hold a candle to you, Will. The way he looks at you … I’ve never seen him look at anyone like that. Trust me when I say that he certainly never looked at me like that.”

The words sound unpracticed and come out sadly. Will, for a moment, feels empathy for her situation. He can’t imagine the pain he would feel if he saw Hannibal with someone else, even before they started officially dating. It would eat him alive.

“It was never our intention to hurt you, Alana.” It’s not exactly the truth, but it’s not exactly a lie, either. Hannibal had meant to hurt her, Will is sure of it with the way he blatantly told her the truth about the stupid beer. He had wanted to see her squirm much like Will wants to see Hannibal squirm. He can’t be angry at him if he’s doing the same thing, albeit for much different reasons.

And Will … he hadn’t cared if she was hurt or not. All he wanted was for her to keep her distance. He had wanted Hannibal to be his usual polite self about it, not the curious monster that had come out to play, the needy thing that craves Will’s hand and will do anything to get it.

It’s true Will didn’t want to explicitly hurt her feelings, but he was neutral to how that distance was created. It makes him no different than Hannibal and he refuses to offer further empty apologies.

“I know that now,” Alana says after a while. “You are entering your first serious relationship in a long time. You needed to exert some amount of control to keep it from slipping through your fingers.”

“I would appreciate it if you didn’t psychoanalyze me at a dinner party,” Will says grouchily.

“Or anywhere else, I imagine,” she smiles.

It’s quiet between them for a few minutes while they both watch the party unfold into something boisterous. Occasionally, but enough to be considered compulsively, Hannibal’s eyes will lock with Will’s. When Will stares back at him unblinkingly, Hannibal dips his head and turns his attention back to whoever he’s speaking with, his smile lighting up his face as no doubt pretty words leave his cultured mouth.

Will never answers Alana’s question. He doesn’t know if they’re okay. He doesn’t know that they’ll ever be, but only time will tell.

“How did Jack take the news?” Alana asks.

Will huffs. “About as well as you’d expect. He claimed to have the same concerns you did.”

A playful look crosses over her features. “Did Jack also think Hannibal was dating him?” Will gives her a flat look. “What, too soon?”

Will just shakes his head, but he can't fight the grin that breaks out over his face. "Too soon. Although, that is a funny picture."

"It is," she agrees with a tinkling laugh. "He thought Hannibal was being unethical."

"Yep."

Alana nods sagely and takes another sip of her beer. "You must be tired of hearing that."

"I am."

"Will –"

"It's okay," he cuts her off gently. He isn't trying to be rude, but he's done with apologies for the moment. "It's okay."

"Is it? I'm starting to see that you feel infantilized by a lot of people."

Will crosses his arms over his chest. "I don't just feel it, I am it. You, Jack, everyone treats me like I don't know any better. Everyone walks on eggshells around me. Everyone but one person."

"Hannibal." Will looks at her and it's the only confirmation she needs. "He's good for you."

"He is," he says softly. "Come on, let's go enjoy the party."

Alana nods and follows him out of the foyer.

In the parlor, something Will still refers to as an overstated living room in the privacy of his mind, the party is in full swing. Guests are happily munching away on the prosciutto topped watermelon cubes Hannibal made and sipping more champagne by the second, talking away in large groups. Will can hear snippets of conversation: someone just bought a yacht, someone heard that Renaldo Something is having an affair with his secretary, something about an opera showing that was absolutely breathtaking.

Will drinks every word in and lets his empathy open up to the room. It's loud, conversation aside. Half of the people are only here for the clout and the other half are here because their significant other is. Hannibal had been right: these people are not here for him, they are here for Count Hannibal Lecter VIII and all the societal points it brings them for being on his guest list.

Bedelia is here to lord her significance over everyone. Elena Komeda is perhaps one of the few people actually here for Hannibal, aside from Alana and Jack. He instantly likes her for it.

Distress.

Will frowns, searching the crowd. Almost immediately, Hannibal comes into his view. There's sweat beading on his forehead and his flute is empty as he reaches for another. It's not warm in the house – Hannibal had lowered the central air to accommodate the mass of

people. And Will can feel something akin to panic emanating from his very pores as he smoothly talks to his acquaintances, eyes skirting to Will every so often.

Hannibal's discomfort doesn't have the effect on him he was expecting. Instead of making him feel vindicated and righteous, it makes him feel uneasy and wrong. His stomach starts to knot and his fingers clench around nothing.

He realizes with a start why: he is not Hannibal. Hannibal may enjoy playing with people, but Will does not. His darkness is a different breed and it took, yet again, a negative to see the positive. Just like with Cassie Boyle on the stag head in the field, Hannibal had once again, unknowingly this time, provided Will with more insight. Only this time, it was in regards to himself.

Will makes his way over to Hannibal.

He sees the other man swallow as he approaches. His conversation with Mr. Bailey continues even as he side-eyes Will's incoming.

When he reaches the sweating doctor, Hannibal manages a smile for him, but it's unsteady.

They're discussing the merits of a brass section in a string symphony and Will has no interest in partaking. Instead, he casually loops his arm around Hannibal's waist and drops a kiss to his cheek. The older man's muscles are stiff as a board when Will touches him and only stiffen further with the gentle contact.

Will has made a mistake.

"What do you think, young man?" Mr. Bailey, a lawyer of some kind, asks him directly, looking at him expectantly.

It looks like he's partaking after all. "It depends, honestly," Will replies, wishing he had a drink in his hand. "I think a brass section adds a bit of oomph, but strings are pleasant enough by themselves. I don't know if the same can be said in reverse."

"My thoughts exactly," Hannibal supplies, not leaning into Will's affection, but not leaning away from it either.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," Will says with an apologetic smile. "Hannibal, something in the kitchen needs our attention."

"Ah, of course. Gary, please excuse us for a moment."

"Sure, sure," Gary says with a wave.

Once they're a good distance away Hannibal whispers, "Thank you. The man can talk one's ear off if you let him."

"Wouldn't do for that to happen, would it? I like your ears," Will responds.

Hannibal gives him a strange look as they continue towards the kitchen. Will can sense his confusion.

Once they are in the kitchen, Hannibal looks around for the issue. When he finds nothing but an empty room full of food, he turns his gaze to Will, nervous and resigned to whatever fate he has deemed for himself.

“You’re leaving, aren’t you?” Hannibal asks quietly.

“No, I’m staying. I told you I was.”

“You told me you were staying for the party. That’s not what I’m asking.”

The kitchen still smells like whatever Hannibal is his sous chefs were making. Thankfully they are outside taking a break before the main course, meaning they have the space to themselves for what Will is about to say.

He takes a steadying breath. “It was unfair of me to hang you in suspense.”

“It was premeditated, then?”

Will decides there’s no reason not to be honest. Honesty is something they desperately need. “Yes.”

Hannibal licks his lips at that and a blank look crosses over his face. “You’re angry. You have every right to be.”

“I know I do.”

“I never saw you as a toy, Will. If you can believe anything I ever say again, believe that.”

“I believe you had a purpose, and I believe you went about it in the absolute worst way.” Will walks a little closer to him, his steps steady and clunking on the tile, reverberating throughout the kitchen menacingly. Hannibal’s spine straightens. “You don’t need to blind me. I accept you as you are. Do you accept me as I am? Or did you intend to change me?”

“Why did you come tonight, Will? Why did you bring me flowers? We spoke on the phone last night and you didn’t breathe a word of this to me, didn’t even act like anything was out of the ordinary. Why?”

Will stands now chest to chest with his partner, the tips of their shoes touching. Will shifts so he can be closer, slot is feet in between Hannibal’s and leans up to kiss him.

The sound Hannibal makes as their lips touch is a broken thing, full of blatant surprise and disbelief and cracks towards the end. His lips don’t respond to Will’s like they usually do. They are stiff, unmoving. Will powers through it and opens his mouth, swipes his tongue along the firm seam of the other man’s lips.

Will pulls away after a moment, just when Hannibal starts to finally respond. “Because I love you, and I forgive you.”

“This conversation would have been better had last night.”

Will shakes his head. “This needed to be face to face.”

“Are we going to discuss it now, then? We have guests and hours more of dallying with them.”

“No, not now,” Will says, “but you’re not enjoying yourself, not really. Please just pretend everything is okay for now so we can not be the talk of the town for throwing a horrendous party,” he tries to joke. Hannibal doesn’t laugh, doesn’t even smile.

“How am I supposed to enjoy myself with so much at stake?”

“Hannibal. I’m not leaving you.”

“But you said –”

“I know what I said, and I’m saying this now. I’m not leaving you.”

Hannibal looks like he wants to believe him. “You don’t know everything. You can’t possibly know that.”

“Are you going to be honest with me? About everything?”

“Yes,” Hannibal says quickly.

“Do you love me? Do you want to hurt me?”

“I do love you. I don’t want to hurt you. Not anymore. Not for a long time, Will.”

“Why did you want to hurt me before? Just answer me that and we can go back to our guests.”

Hannibal looks at him, really looks at him, searching his eyes with baited breath as Will waits. “I wanted to see your becoming. I knew pain would be a part of that. I wasn’t necessarily trying to hurt you, but I knew it would happen and I didn’t stop.”

“You did stop,” Will reminds him.

“Not soon enough.”

It’s still a lot to take in, even with the prior knowledge Will has of Hannibal hiding that he was sick, of wondering what else Hannibal did to him, of him being the Ripper and the Copycat Killer. Of him being a cannibal. Will is not hurt by those things; he’s hurt by Hannibal hurting him purposefully.

But that conversation will have to wait for a more appropriate time.

“Kiss me,” Will commands.

Hesitantly, oh so hesitantly, Hannibal leans in. His lips are petal soft and damp from him licking them when they touch Will's. It's chaste, but it lingers, making their lips stick together when they pull apart.

"Stop fretting and go entertain your friends," Will then says. "I'm going to pour myself a drink. I'll be out shortly."

"Yes, Will." And he leaves through the French door leading out into the rest of the house.

Will stands there and thinks before he, too, goes back out.

The rest of the party unfolds naturally and beautifully. Will and Hannibal mingle with everyone, side by side, arms around each other. They smile and laugh and occasionally kiss each other's cheek or forehead. It feels normal, almost, if not for all the people in the room.

They eat. Will sits at the opposite head of the table and speaks with Elena and her husband about their interests and hobbies. Elena writes crime novels, her husband is a retired naval officer who fishes. It gives Will and him something to talk about.

He wonders how a novelist he's never heard of and a retired officer have so much money, but it would be rude to ask.

Hannibal gazes at him over the table as he encourages conversation, Will's flowers in the middle of the centerpiece. Will smiles back at him. For now, everything is okay. The calm before the storm.

Will puts a succulent cut of meat in his mouth and chews, takes a sip of wine that is paired beautifully with the meal. Conversation flows and time passes. All he can do is wait for what comes next.

Chapter End Notes

Oh Hannibal, you silly goose.

I want to give a fair warning: the last chapter is giving me some trouble as I work it out and try to wrap everything up. I want to leave no stone unturned, but I will say this - please don't worry about the ending. I will say no more.

I will try to have it up by next Monday, but no promises. Rest assured, I will be working tirelessly to get it to you as soon as possible!

Also, I totally proposed to my boyfriend and he said yes so yeah, that happened.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Will have a talk and it doesn't go well.

Chapter Notes

So. I'm really nervous about posting this chapter. I've reread it several times and don't know how to make it better, so this is what I give you. Thank you all for being here, I can't believe I wrote this many words! Please note that there is vomiting in one scene, but it's really small and not graphic.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dinner proceeds without issue. Everyone is having a good time, refilling their glasses and scarfing down Hannibal's food with muttered praises around their mouthfuls. Five different courses are brought out with palate cleansers in between and two different desserts to top it off and by the time after-dinner drinks are served, Will is exhausted.

It's well into the night when the first of their guests start to leave. Will is just as gracious with Hannibal's socialite friends as they leave as he was when they arrived; smiling, handing them their coats, wishing them a good night and thanking them for coming.

An hour later, Will and Hannibal are walking Jack, Bella, and Alana to the door. They had stayed and chatted with him and Hannibal about cases, work, and everything else that didn't matter. Will had been worried Jack would use this opportunity to say something else about their relationship, but it seems to Will that Bella keeps her husband in check, and their conversation goes on unobstructed by prying.

Jack leaves with a wary look between both Will and Hannibal, a look that lingers and promises words Will doesn't want to hear. Will is about to say something snarky when Bella shoos her husband out to the car and leaves them with a sincere thank you. Hannibal air kisses her cheeks and then she, too, is gone.

Alana lingers.

"I'm glad I stayed," she says. Hannibal offers her a smile. Will nods. "Where do we go from here?"

“We go as we always have, with some footnotes,” Will says. “Just give me some time to acclimate.”

“I can do that,” she replies. “Have a good night.” And with that, there are no more guests to see out.

Leaving Will and Hannibal alone.

Will shuts the door with a soft click and then turns to Hannibal. The distress from before is making a reappearance in Hannibal’s features, albeit in an understated way. His micro expressions – the tightness around his shifting eyes, playing with his lips – are telling Will all he needs to know. Trepidation, fear of loss, resignation to ugly truths. Hannibal is doing his best to appear calm and collected, but Will knows him far too well for that.

“Let’s go to the study,” Will says, masking the command with a suggestion.

Hannibal hesitates. “May I make us some tea first?” Will knows it’s so Hannibal will have something to do with his hands, but doesn’t comment, feeling like it would be rude to call such a gesture out.

“Sure. May I light a fire?”

“Make yourself at home,” Hannibal says, turning to go into his kitchen.

Will nods and leaves Hannibal to it while he traces the familiar steps to the doctor’s well loved study. When he gets there, a stack of dry logs is waiting for him in the fireplace. He goes about turning on the gas and lighting them. When he’s satisfied the flame will keep, he retreats into one of the plush leather chairs facing the fireplace and waits.

Many absent thoughts cross his mind. He tries not to pay them too much attention, and it only slightly works. He wants to remain in the present and not give too much thought about the future that will take place once Hannibal returns. Will wonders if Hannibal is arming himself. Will brought no weapons with him, didn’t feel the need to. What happens will happen and he resigned to his fate.

A few minutes later, Hannibal enters bearing a tray with two tea cups and a porcelain teapot. He places the tray on the table and then takes his seat gingerly, flicking his eyes back and forth between Will's face and somewhere in the vicinity of his chest.

He’s nervous.

Good.

Both men stay silent, waiting for the other to start, but neither want to. Will decides he is going to have to. “We have a lot to talk about,” he comments.

“So we do.”

No explanation, no apology, just waiting for Will to start. Typical. “If you treat this like a therapy session, I’m out.” He knows it’s unfair. Hannibal tends to revert back into therapist-

speak when he's anxious, or unsure, Will has noticed. Too bad.

"I will do my best, but you'll forgive me if I stray."

Will huffs, but not because he's amused. "We'll see. Here's what's going to happen: we are going to ask each other whatever we want and the other will answer honestly. If there is a question that cannot be answered, it'll be answered anyway. Understood?"

Hannibal swallows. Tilts his chin up in a haughty sort of nod.

"You may start," Will prompts him.

Hannibal asks immediately, "How did you find out?"

Will settles back into his chair with his mug of tea; jasmine, he thinks. It smells nice, soothing. "I was laying in bed. I couldn't sleep and I was thinking about you as I usually do. I was reminiscing. I remembered that day in your office and how you leaned in to smell me and how taken aback I was. Then you asked me about symptoms. I put the pieces together," Will answers. His turn. "What is my becoming?"

Hannibal takes his mug and adds two sugar cubes to it, stirring them in daintily. "You hide much of yourself from the world, from your own eyes. I wanted to bring all of you into the light. I wanted to see you fully realized, to become the truest version of yourself." He tilts his head. "Why didn't you tell me earlier? You could have driven to see me if it was important, and that is important, or I would have come to you. As I said before: I will always make time for you."

Will shrugs. "I wasn't certain until that stunt you pulled with Alana. It made me realize how deep your penchant for manipulation truly ran. I wanted to be certain before accusing you of something like that. Why did you tell Alana about the conversation she and I had when I asked you not to?"

"It felt prudent," is all Hannibal offers. It's not good enough for Will.

"You mean it served your agenda."

"I suppose in a way it did. She asked me if I was ever interested in her, and I asked her why she inquired about that considering she already told you I was. It angered me. I acted impulsively."

"I don't believe it was impulsive," Will remarks.

"It was," Hannibal argues back. "I told you I would be honest, Will. I thought about you insisting I not say anything, and in a fit of pique, I felt compelled to anyway. I consider that impulsive."

Will accepts that answer. "Will this be a recurring theme? Me asking you not to do something and you doing it anyway?"

Hannibal eyes him questioningly. "I believe it is my turn to ask the –"

“Answer the question, Hannibal.” Will interrupts lightly, but firmly.

A pause. Hannibal takes a sip of his tea, but has a demure look about him as he heeds Will’s command; his chin tilted down, his eyes downcast. “No. I will do better. I cannot promise perfection, but I will do better,” he says fervently.

After a while of back and forth consideration, Will finally nods. “I would appreciate it. I would, of course, pay you the same courtesy if you asked me not to tell someone something.”

“I know you would. I made a mistake.”

Will’s sighing breath is almost fond. “Ask your question.”

Hannibal’s finger taps a steady rhythm on his tea cup. “What were you and Alana discussing in the foyer?”

Will is not surprised that he’s asking. “Alana asked me if she and I were okay. I never fully answered her. We talked further about the scene in the kitchen and made tentative amends. She told me it was difficult watching you and I together when she wanted us both at some point. Did you truly tell Alana the truth about the beer just so you could have the need for … what, atonement?”

Hannibal wipes his hand on his tuxedo pants before he realizes he’s doing it and stops, placing both hands back on his steaming mug with no small amount of dignity. “Yes.”

“Elaborate please,” Will says after a few moments of silence, nothing but the crackling of fire filling the space around them.

“I’m not sure that needs elaboration,” he sniffs. Will simply stares at him. Hannibal’s cheeks look darker than usual and Will knows it’s not a trick of the light. He sighs before answering. “I enjoyed it, is that what you want to hear? I didn’t know how to have that again without having to ask.”

Will frowns at that. “But you can ask,” he says, confused. “I would never deny you what you need. And don’t … don’t tell me what I want to hear. Tell me the truth. Is that so much to ask?”

“I will admit, I’m not used to this level of honesty. So I suppose it is.”

“Hannibal.”

“I shouldn’t need it, Will. I never have before.” Hannibal leans in a little closer, a hint of teeth showing as he says in a whisper, “I debased myself for you. And I *enjoyed it.* ”

A shiver runs down Will’s spine at the raw look in the older man’s eyes. For a moment, Will doesn’t know how to respond, the heat tingling up and down his extremities distracting him from their very important conversation.

“With every touch, we are remade,” Will reminds him once he gains his bearings. “This didn’t come out of nowhere. I think you’ve been burying this for a long time with no one you

felt you could express it with." The implication that Will is that one is obvious. It's perhaps an arrogant thing to say, but no less true for it. Hannibal seems to agree if his expression is any indication.

"Perhaps you're right, Will. How does it feel to know that you've changed me?"

Will considers this carefully. This question comes with landmines and it wouldn't do to accidentally step on one in the spirit of honesty. "I haven't changed you. I've brought compassion to your surface, but I haven't changed you. To answer your question about how that makes me feel? Powerful, moved beyond belief. Selfish because it's just for me and I like it that way. You were a geode: hardened and hiding something breathtaking and I picked you open and exposed you. I understand fully that that's no easy feat."

"An impossible feat, I'd say."

"Not for me."

"No," Hannibal looks into his cup. "Not for you."

Will takes a sip of his tea, pleasantly hot on his tongue and fragrant to his nostrils. "What were you trying to bring out in me? What do you think you see?" He thinks he already knows the answer, but he needs to hear it confirmed.

Hannibal crosses one leg over the other and bounces his foot a few times. Will has never seen him do that before. He watches the older man try to gather himself with distant fascination.

"Darkness brought about by injustice. A fallen angel that wishes to avenge those who have been wronged. A deep shame at these thoughts as they bombard your standing moral code, your ethics, what you believe you should be. I saw the trappings of your forts and wanted to break them so I could free you."

"And if I don't want to be freed?" Will knows exactly the darkness that Hannibal is referring to; the dark twisting roads of his mind were never easy to walk. He used to be too scared to. These days, he looks at himself and his inner workings with acceptance that's only marginally difficult. It will never be easy, but knowing himself, he admits, has done him no disservice.

"I know better now not to play with that which I don't understand," Hannibal eventually replies. "I thought I understood you, Will, but you surprise me daily. I am grateful for it, but I am … also lost."

Lost. Afloat on a sea he thought was familiar but turned out to be treacherous; the ebb and flow of Will's mind unable to keep anyone above water. Will feels for him, he really does. He knows it hurts Hannibal to keep his secrets so guarded for so long only to have his own forts flayed open for the taking.

Will decides to offer him validation and praise.

"Thank you for being so honest with me. I appreciate that it's difficult for you, Hannibal."

Hannibal's eyes close with veneration. His hands tighten around his mug incrementally, his knuckles blanching and then returning to normal color as he releases his grip. "You might not think so if you continue this line of questioning."

"I intend to finish what I started. Do you have a question for me?"

More silence as Hannibal thinks. Will watches how the fire plays over the other man's face, shadowing the crevices beneath his sharp features and highlighting others with a warm glow. He is so beautiful. He will always be beautiful, no matter what happens.

"What are your specific boundaries when it comes to Dr. Bloom?"

That's easy to answer. "I thought I was clear on that."

"I'd like for you to be clear once more. Humor me, please."

Will sighs. "I don't want you to be alone with her unless you tell me beforehand or immediately after if it's unexpected. If you are with her, I want to know about your interactions. You don't have to recite your conversation word for word, the gist of it is fine or anything else I'd want to know about. I don't want you touching her except to shake her hand. I don't want you texting her unless it's about business, but you may be cordial and ask after her day once your business is concluded. How does that sound?"

Hannibal smiles with his eyes, crinkling around the corners handsomely. "Reasonable."

"It's really not," Will says with a huff of breath, his anger and frustration for the moment directed towards himself for his behavior. "You can understand my needs are unreasonable while at the same time meeting them. It doesn't have to be either, or."

"I find your boundaries perfectly reasonable, Will," Hannibal says. The edge is gone from his voice, his face. He's calmer now that they're actually talking and Will isn't leaving. The weight that had been hanging over Hannibal's head from before looks to be diminishing, but is still vaguely present, waiting, waiting.

"I don't want you finding loopholes," Will warns.

"I won't." His brow furrows, his lips twitch. "I promised you I would do better, Will. That extends to all areas of our relationship."

Will nods after a moment. "Just wanted to make sure. You seem like the type that needs the lines drawn verbally. You enjoy crossing lines."

"I wouldn't say I enjoy it. I feel neutral about crossing lines."

"What other lines have you crossed with me, Hannibal?"

Hannibal swallows a sip of tea before setting it down gently on the tray. He isn't leaning back in his chair anymore. Instead, he moves to sit forward, elbows resting on his knees.

"I was going to tell you. Eventually."

“Tell me what?” Will asks with a frown.

Hannibal’s jaw ticks. “This is where you leave me.”

Will almost rolls his eyes. “I’m not sure what’s worse than you keeping a potentially fatal illness from me for your own gain. And yet here I am.”

Hannibal stares at him for a long stretch of time. Will meets his gaze while he sips on his now lukewarm tea. He’s not doing it to enjoy the beverage anymore. The air between them is tense with whatever words Hannibal intends to say, and Will mentally steels himself for the oncoming fight one delicate sip at a time.

Hannibal is the first to look away. “I hypnotized you without your knowledge.” Wait, what? “I injected psychoactive drugs into your bloodstream without your consent.” No. No, no, no. “I employed psychic driving techniques upon you while you were under.”

Will’s face falls slowly as Hannibal speaks. He feels like he’s going to be sick.

All of those dreams he had where he saw the pendulum, one that was different than he was familiar with, swinging behind his closed eyes. A melodic voice, deep and gravelly, telling him soft suggestions, whispered like sweet nothings. The worsening symptoms of his encephalitis, the lost time, the seizures.

It had all been Hannibal.

It was all starting to make sense.

It was all too much.

Will shoots out of his seat and starts to pace in front of the crackling fire, a hand scrubbing across the back of his neck in a self-soothing gesture that doesn’t work. Hannibal stays in his seat, looking at Will imploringly. He has the decency to at least look as shame-faced as Will has ever seen him.

The pendulum swings without his conscious permission. Images bombard his mind, his forts obliterated, making the strength he had been gathering for months turn inconceivably fragile. The images are so vivid that they hurt his eyes and he has to screw them shut against the barrage of intense color. Noise whistles in his ears, banging on his ear drums in an unsteady beat, too sharp to be anything but painful. Taste blooms across his taste buds, taste buds that are his, but not his. Everything in the room has a smell and it’s too much and, as it overcomes him, it overwhelms him completely.

He has barely enough presence of mind to know that he has sunken deep into the waters of the Ripper, of Hannibal. His Hannibal. His mind is beautiful, dangerous, deep with emotions he rarely lets show through. Will never knew, could never have guessed, how deep his feelings truly ran.

The Ripper no longer gently coasts through Will’s mind, mindful of the objects within this sacred space and respectful of them. He now rampages through the very walls of Will’s skull,

shaking his foundations until they are cracked and dust plumes into the air.

It's so much, what Hannibal *feels.* It's *so much.*

A predator at the top of his perch, empty save for himself, watching the insects fall in line beneath him. Tedious. Bored. Nothing satisfies anymore.

A light in the distance. Shining eyes. God, but they shine so bright. The eyes of another predator? Yes. A predator that has no idea what he holds inside. It will be my honor, my privilege, to show him. I will be his guide.

Darkness falling away to make room for the light. It takes over everything. Everything. No more shadows. The light burns so brightly, burns his skin that's only been touched by its absence for so long. What to do, what to do.

An insatiable hunger. Starving, raw with want. Colors are bright again, meals are more enjoyable; everything that was once dull comes back to life with a roar. You've brought the life back to me. You are my everything. I will be yours. Yours, yours, yours …

" –r name is Will Graham. You are in Baltimore, Maryland, at my home. You are coming back out, now, Will. Come back to me. Come back, now."

Spoken so softly, the words holding an ache he can now fathom. Will can hardly hear over the blood pounding in his ears. A firm grip on his hand, familiar, grounding. Someone is trying to pull him out. Only one person pulls him out.

Must have you. Must have you. I must. You are mine and I am yours, yours, yo–

"You were lonely. Desperate." Is that his voice? Will doesn't know anymore. It doesn't sound like his voice. It sounds discombobulated. His hand feels like it's threatening to break. He pulls it out of the vice-like grip with a jolt.

Hannibal lets him go. His hand is suspended in the air, though, as if waiting for Will's hand to meet his own again. "For you," Hannibal affirms just under his breath.

"You –" Will has to stop. Tears threaten to fall from his eyes, not out of sadness, but out of anger. "I trusted you. Even knowing what you are, I trusted you!" he yells, turning his gaze up from where he had been tracing the lines of Hannibal's tie to look up at him with a fire he can feel in his eyes, burning them, stinging them. "I *trusted* you," he whispers. His face feels wet.

Hannibal has gone still.

His maroon eyes are wet, as wet as Will's, and they shine and glimmer in the light of the fire. His hand is still reaching out for Will. "Even knowing what I am? What; a psychopath?"

Will huffs angrily and wipes his face with his sleeve. "I've told you: I don't see you as a psychopath. If you are, it's atypical in presentation and it's never fucking bothered me. Nothing about you bothers me, Hannibal. It should, but it never has."

“Will. Is there something else you know about me?” he whispers. So fragile. He has never seen Hannibal as fragile, ever, but the image presented before him – eyes broken, mouth slack, face tight – fragile is the only word he can think of. Will is about to break them both.

He feels a lump the size of a small rock lodge itself in his throat, unyielding. His hands are shaking. “ … I know.”

In an instant, Hannibal is on him. He moves deadly quick and before Will can take his next breath, there are fingers wrapped around his throat, his back hitting the bookshelf by the fireplace with a loud thud that aches, sharp and digging into his spine.

Will doesn’t fight it, doesn’t fight him. He knew this might happen.

His fingers, fingers that have touched him so gently, fingers that have been inside of his body, tighten around the tender muscles of his neck. Will can’t breathe. Still, he doesn’t fight. He tilts his head back and lets it happen. He can feel his face growing numb, his whole body going lax. Numb everywhere skin doesn’t touch.

The next instant, he can *breathe*.

He takes in a heaving breath, choking as he gulps air down, his hand coming up to soothe his battered throat.

Hannibal is on the other side of the room in three large backward strides, breathing just as heavily as Will is and looking absolutely *wrecked* .

Will takes a moment to check himself over mentally. His throat will likely bruise, but not much. Hannibal had been squeezing him for no longer than a few seconds, but his grip had been *hard.* His back smarts, but what’s another bruise? What’s anything anymore? Nothing matters.

Will stays where he is, still panting.

Hannibal is clutching onto his desk. For balance, maybe. Or maybe because he has to be squeezing the life out of something and Italian ingrained wood does the trick just as well as flesh.

They stare at each other, one calm, the other not. Hannibal is close to hyperventilating. Will is close to going to him, comforting him. His damned empathy makes it to where he has already forgiven him.

How can he not, when he understands? When he has *seen.*

“I’ve known for a long time,” Will coughs into the room. It feels like it echoes. His voice sounds horrible. “I told you I don’t pick and choose.”

“Why didn’t you fight me?” He has never heard Hannibal’s voice sound so friable. It trembles. It’s spoken through the hurdle of whatever is clogging up his throat.

“Before our first date, in fact,” Will continues mindlessly. “I’ve known, I *knew* and I still wanted you.” He’s finally catching his breath. God, his neck hurts.

Several beats of silence pass. The only thing that fills the silence are Hannibal’s perilous grabs for oxygen.

“Why didn’t you fight me?” Hannibal repeats desperately. His voice is raised.

“I know what you cook. I know what I eat when I’m at your table. I know why you were so busy this week, preparing for your party. I know what they ate.” Will laughs hysterically. “I watched them and I enjoyed it. Enjoyed watching you watch them as they put it in their mouths and happily swallowed. No displays though. I was wondering about that, but …”

“Will,” Hannibal sobs brokenly. “Why didn’t you *fight me.*”

“You could have had me, Hannibal. You could have had me without all the shit you did to me,” he says softly. “It was all unnecessary. Everything. All of it. I would have still wanted you.”

He hasn’t been looking at the other man’s face as he talked, but now he does. Hannibal is openly crying, face smeared with salty tears and snot, his mouth parted, trying to ask once again *why?*

“I would have let you kill me. There is no point in this life without you.”

“Will,” he sobs again. A litany of his name falls from the older man’s lips like he does when they’re making love. “Will.”

“I forgive you.” Will takes a step away from the bookshelf he was careened into, then another. “I’m not going to tell anyone. You can either kill me or let me leave. Which is it going to be?”

Hannibal releases a loud breath and hunches over like he’s been hit in the stomach. “I can’t,” he shakes his head. “I can’t do either.”

“You’re going to have to choose,” Will says calmly.

“Please don’t,” Hannibal begs. “Please, Will. Please stay.”

“I’m going to start walking. Make your decision before I reach those doors.”

“Will, *please.*”

“I need time.”

Hannibal stops breathing. “Only time?”

“Maybe. We’ll see.”

Will takes another step. Another, watching Hannibal for any sign of impending violence, ready for it. He almost wants it if it means not having to look at him as he is now: broken, vulnerable. Fragile. He walks slowly until he reaches the doors leading into the study. He takes one last look at Hannibal, hunched over, pleading with his eyes for Will to stay. Will blinks down at him like he sees nothing and goes out of the French doors.

He makes it to the foyer. He can hear agonized wailing from inside the house. Something crashing. He doesn't stop.

He makes it to his car.

He makes it home.

Will walks into his little farm house, greets his seven dogs, and goes for an unopened bottle of whiskey, not bothering with a glass.

Will is tired when he wakes up the next afternoon. Yesterday was Saturday so today is Sunday, he thinks. He hopes. Otherwise, he is in serious trouble. If it's actually Monday, he's fucked.

He reaches a hand out to blindly pat around the bed, looking for his phone. When he brings it up to his face, the screen is so bright he has to look away, but not before reassuring himself that it is, indeed, Sunday.

He has nowhere to be. He reaches around on the side of his bed for the bottle of whiskey that's on the floor and, when he finally finds it, takes a deep sip.

He feels nauseous. His head hurts. His mouth is dry and tastes like ass. The whiskey does nothing to wet his tongue. He takes another swig anyway.

Dogs. He has to feed his dogs. They need him. He glances at the digital clock on the left side of his bed and curses. It's almost noon, four hours past their usual breakfast time. He's surprised they didn't wake him.

He sits up slowly, but it does nothing for his swimming vision. Something acidic and acrid is rising up his throat. He barely makes it to the kitchen sink in time before he's vomiting up everything his body couldn't handle. He can't smell any bile, only alcohol.

He rinses out the sink and collects the dogs' homemade food from the fridge. The smell nearly makes him gag. Thankfully there is enough for everyone. He will have to make more tonight, though, provided he isn't too shitfaced. He'll set an alarm on his phone just in case.

Carefully, he bends to scoop out their usual amounts into each bowl, sized differently for his different breeds of mutt. They wait patiently as he goes about his task. When he whistles, they come storming to their assigned bowl and start scarfing it down. He feels guilty.

He feels … guilty.

Hannibal had been a mess when he had left him. Hannibal had needed him to stay and Will had left. He had needed to leave. He couldn't possibly have stayed. He couldn't have stayed when he knew the truth of all of what Hannibal had done to him. He couldn't.

He doesn't know what will happen now. Maybe Hannibal will come to kill him once he's calmed down and digested everything. Maybe Hannibal will leave him be. Maybe Hannibal will leave, period.

At the thought of all of those options, Will goes to the bathroom and throws up a second time. He takes a hot shower, using his old three-in-one that he had stopped using for Hannibal, and towels off after the water starts running cool. He dresses in a fresh pair of boxers and puts on sweatpants and an old pullover from his academy days, worn and soft and cozy. He picks up his whiskey bottle, sits in his bed, and drinks his day away.

A day passes.

A week.

Two weeks.

Three.

Hannibal doesn't text him, doesn't call. Nothing. Will can't tell if he's grateful for it or not.

He keeps himself busy. Spending more time with his dogs, fishing, working on boat motors for random people and crafting more lures than he will ever use. He's closed a case for Jack and spends time painstakingly ironing out his lectures. He does everything he can to keep his mind occupied.

It doesn't work, but he persists in trying regardless. He has to or else it will consume him: wondering what else Hannibal had done to him over the several months of their association, remembering things he didn't want to think about, taking apart everything Hannibal had ever said to him to try and parse out the truth, whatever that may be.

He drinks.

Will goes to work hungover more often than not. If his students notice his lack of usual witty remarks during lecture and a change in his overall demeanor, they don't say. He feels worse than he did when he was sick.

It's Friday when Jack comes into his lecture hall once the students have filed out, a looming presence Will has grown used to making its way towards him to demand his presence at a

crime scene yet again without asking if he has other plans. There are no other plans when it comes to Jack, they're not allowed.

Will doesn't think he can stomach the smell of decay with remnants of alcohol swimming in his veins. He goes about putting his things in his satchel like he doesn't see him.

"Will –"

"No."

"Will."

"I need a break, Jack. I've already caught one for you this week."

"Well I need you to catch another," Jack says in his typical voice: calm, even, brooking no arguments. The agent frowns, a deep thing that Will can feel down to his toes, and takes a step closer into his personal space. "You been drinking, Will?"

Fuck. He forgot his breath mints in his rush to get to work on time, but he brushed his teeth this morning. Maybe Jack is only asking because he looks like shit. He certainly can't smell anything on himself. "No. Headaches are coming back," he says, and it's not technically a lie. "Can't sleep." And that's definitely not a lie.

Maybe his sleeplessness will account for how red and puffy his eyes are. Maybe his headaches will get him out of having to go to another crime scene when he knows he isn't strong enough to wade back out on his own in the state he's in.

Jack's frown softens at his false admission. His expression looks like a cross between pity and concern and Will hates it. "You tell Hannibal?"

The mention of his name out loud hurts. Will winces. "No. I don't want to worry him."

"Will," Jack steps even closer. Will wants to clutch himself protectively. He feels like he's falling apart. "Is it coming back?"

Will blinks and tries to appear normal. He offers Jack a wobbly smile after trying and failing to a few times and straightens up his posture. "I don't think so. No fevers, no hallucinations, no sleepwalking. Just … a bad headache."

Jack looks at him for a second before puffing out a breath. "Will. I think it's the Ripper. I need your eyes out there."

He rears back as if he's been slapped. It feels like he has; a physical sensation that follows Jack's words. Will tries to make it seem like he was just continuing to shove his things in his bag in a rush to get out so he doesn't look so jumpy.

The Ripper.

It rings in his ears like a drum. Will momentarily forgets to breathe.

No. Absolutely not.

“How far away?”

“Baltimore. At the old brick church.”

He sighs heavily. That means he’ll have to cancel his last lecture of the day, which Jack will no doubt approve. That means there’s no reason for him to really say no, headache and exhaustion aside. Jack is used to him being less than his best. It’s never stopped him before. Jack only cares about one thing.

“Fine.” Will puts his hands on the podium once his shit is packed. He hangs his head between his arms and breathes. In and out, steady and slow and deep.

Jack waits. He doesn’t ask if Will is okay enough to do this.

Will follows the other man out. He feels sick with nerves and his hands are shaking. He doesn’t know if he can do this without making it obvious that something is wrong. He just wants to go home and drink, forget this day, this week, this month has ever happened.

He hopes and prays to a god he doesn’t believe in that Hannibal won’t be there.

The drive there is thankfully quiet as Jack steers them in and out of traffic, shooting concerned glances at Will when he has the chance to take his eyes off the busy road. Will pretends not to notice and doesn’t say anything when the fifth or sixth glance comes his way. He’s tired, and his problems are no one else’s business and he doesn’t want to talk about it.

Couples get into fights. Not like the one Hannibal and Will got into, and they maybe don’t deal with it in the way Will has been, but fights happen.

“Is Hannibal coming?” Will asks. It pains him to even say his name out loud instead of in the safe recesses of his mind.

“He’s going to meet us there,” Jack says gruffly. “He’s finally not busy enough to help out. I know you prefer him there when you do your thing.” Jack looks at him then. It feels distinctly like prodding. “Everything okay between you two?”

“Yeah everything’s fine,” Will remarks with a soft laugh, fake as all get out. “Doing great.”

Jack hums. “He hasn’t been around much. Hasn’t invited us to dinner like he usually does.”

“We’ve been spending a lot of time together,” Will lies. “Honeymoon phase and all that.”

“Do you not want to work with him anymore? Now that you’re together? He’s been turning down every chance I get to ask for his help.”

Will turns his head to look at Jack. “Jack, leave it.”

“Don’t lie to me, Will. I can tell something is wrong and I doubt it’s just a headache.”

“It’s not your business.”

“You’re making it my business. You wanted to get with him so bad, but you knew you’d still have to work together. That means you don’t get to let it interfere with investigations. You’re both adults.”

“Jack, he runs his own practice. Hannibal *is* busy,” Will evades. “And it hasn’t interfered. I’ve been doing my job just as I always have. I don’t need a damned babysitter.” It sounds petulant, but Will doesn’t give two shits.

“He used to not be so busy,” Jack quips. Will can hear the invisible quotations around his sarcastic reply.

Will shrugs. “It’s not your place to worry about it.”

“And yet here we are. If you two are fighting, you need to keep it away from work. That’s an order.”

“I’m an independent consultant, you can’t order me. And I have been,” Will replies indignantly. “I’ve been keeping my shit at my door.”

Jack laughs. “You’re on my payroll, Will. I sure can. And I will. I don’t care what’s going on between you two –”

“ – then why did you ask? –”

“All I care about is catching this bastard. I need you on top of your game. Both of you.”

Well. At least he’s honest about it.

By the time they arrive to the scene, the old abandoned church coming into view, Will’s heart is rabbiting in his chest. Hannibal is going to be here. After three weeks, he’s going to see him. He’s not sure anything he does can prepare him for that reality, quickly approaching.

He spots him instantly as Jack parks the SUV. Even with the distance between them as Jack parks them a good walk from the scene, Hannibal’s presence emits a magnetic pull on Will. It always has. He can feel it tugging at him mercilessly, begging him to go to the other man that hurt him so badly, feelings be damned.

He stands out from the throng of FBI personnel; a blob of fine tailoring in his black coat amongst the standard issue blue FBI coats. Ash blonde hair a stark difference from everyone wearing caps. Will thinks he’s going to be sick.

Will is having a hard time finding the motivation to get out of the car. When Jack is at the hood, he turns and looks at Will expectantly through the windshield. Will sighs and closes his eyes, steeling himself for the emotional chaos that’s about to ensue, and gets out. He has to

act normal; like he hasn't been drinking himself stupid every night, like he hasn't shed a single tear over Hannibal fucking Lecter even though, shamefully, that's far from the truth.

Hannibal is facing away from them, thankfully, looking at the church and its worn, white brick, its decrepit steeple. It gives Will a few moments to simply take the other man in. It's been so long since he's been in the same vicinity as him, and his absence aches something fierce. Will seriously considers doing more than just forgiving him, but no. Hannibal will have to prove himself, prove himself worthy of Will's heart. Being pretty isn't enough.

Will flashes his temporary badge to the officers cordoning off the scene and ducks his way under the police tape, not bothering to give Hannibal another glance or a word of greeting. He hears Jack greet the doctor behind him. Hannibal's voice rings out in the open field, gravelly and sophisticated and … Will frowns. Different. Softer. Not holding his usual vicious charm.

Jack and Hannibal follow Will under the tape and to the doors leading into the small church. His own footfalls feel louder than they probably are. All other sound has stopped as his boots clunk on the frayed, wooden floor. His attention is trained on the scene and nothing else and, as he walks up closer to it, it steals his breath.

He knows without a doubt it's Hannibal's work. Agents are either looking at the scene with disgusted curiosity or have their head deep in their notes and files. A passing agent gives him all the basics that she can, but there's not much to go on. There's no ID on the victim and the cause of death is not clear. Just from looking at the body, Will thinks it's possible Hannibal tortured him, leading him to bleed out to death.

The body at the altar is a beautiful mess. It's a man. Blonde-ish hair. Dressed well in a plain, black suit that looks expensive in fabric, but poorly tailored. Will realizes it's because the muscle has been stripped away from the body, the skin sutured back in place. A person suit.

Clever.

He doesn't look peaceful like typical Ripper victims. His eye sockets are empty and the blank stare the corpse emits is eerie in his abject, permanent horror. The chest and abdominal cavities are split wide open from suprasternal notch to groin. His white dress shirt is unbuttoned to show off the grotesque brutality of his murder and it's drenched in blood that has not yet browned with exposure to oxygen.

This was recent. Last night, perhaps, in the early morning hours. Calliphoridae larvae have already started away at the stitched together skin. Will observes them curiously.

Jack meanders up behind him, hands in his coat pockets. "Tell me what you see," he quietly demands.

Will snaps on a pair of gloves that Beverly hands him, her face etched with concern. Likely over his hagrid appearance. He offers her a small smile to show her he's okay even though he's not.

He steps closer to the victim. The pig. Only, this isn't a pig. This man did nothing wrong except share a few features with his killer. He was chosen with a unique purpose.

“I need quiet,” Will says to Jack over his shoulder. Familiar eyes burn holes into the back of his head. He wants to turn around, meet that heavy gaze. He has to physically stop himself from doing so. He knows it isn’t Jack’s and he doesn’t think he can handle it without breaking apart.

Jack immediately barks out at his team. “Alright everyone, clear out. Now!”

“Not Hannibal,” Will amends quickly.

The sea of blue FBI jackets disperses in droves, no one willing to catch Jack’s ire, leaving Will alone with the corpse and his wayward partner. After Jack says, “We’ll be right outside,” he takes a long look at what’s been left for him, and he *knows* that this is for him without a doubt in his mind.

When Will is sure they are alone, the church quiet save for their even breathing, he finally turns to face Hannibal, heart beating a wild rhythm in his chest.

He looks … awful. Will can feel his face falling. Hannibal’s eyes stay trained on Will’s as Will takes him in and then, with something that looks suspiciously like shame, he drops his amber gaze.

Will can’t believe what he’s seeing.

Even in the dim lighting of the church, the change in Hannibal’s appearance is staggering. His hair is unstyled and slightly oily at the roots, his face sporting at least three days worth of silvering stubble. His overcoat is open, showing a plain blue suit that’s slightly wrinkled; no paisley or check patterns, no splashes of color. Dark bags line his eyes like he hasn’t been sleeping. His face is gaunt like he hasn’t been eating. His lips are chapped like he hasn’t been able to stop himself from licking and biting at them.

On anyone else, he would just look like a normal man after a long day of work, but Hannibal is not just anyone else. He’s primed and polished, always, until the very last minute of the day. This is practically slovenly for someone like him.

Will can’t decide if he feels vindicated or upset at seeing him like this, his person suit falling to the wayside to showcase a monster in pain. He decides he feels both in equal measure, causing a conflicting urge to poke the façade with a stick mixed with the desire to go to him and soothe.

Will can’t look away from him. He looks *devastated.*

“Hello, Will,” he says softly. His eyes have come up from the floor, tracing over Will’s face.

“Hello, Hannibal.”

“I’ll be right here.”

Will nods and gets to work. When he turns around, eyes burn into his back.

He looks.

Hannibal isn't proud of this work, it was necessary. He feels all of this is the next step. Will doesn't know why, yet, but he's sure it will all become clear in time.

The corpse is laid out on a large silver tray that expands the length of his body. His chest cavity is completely empty and, when Will looks further, his abdominal cavity is empty too. His hair is slicked back neatly, coated with some blood, but Will can still see the original color. His hands have been cut off. Nothing fills his empty body cavities; no flowers, nothing of symbolism. That is the symbolism – he is empty.

The pendulum swings only once and then he is inside.

What he sees is devastating.

I offer myself to you on a silver platter, yours for the taking. This is my design.

My eyes have seen you, my hands have touched you. I do not deserve either of them. I have lost that privilege. I remove them, detested at my own indulgence of what did not belong to me. This is my design.

I break my ribs while I'm still alive. It hurts. I need it to. I remove my heart that beats for you, my lungs that have held the air you have breathed into me. I leave behind only skin and skeleton, muscle stripped away as your absence has stripped away my need of them; for I am weak. I gut myself for you. I feel gutted. I feel flayed open, so here I am. I remove everything, as you took everything with you when you left. I am nothing, I have nothing. You were everything.

This is my design.

I leave you with my empty shell.

I leave you with my will to live, my will to live, my Will, my W–

Something touches him. A voice like an echo from the distance.

" – ill. Will?"

A firm hand on his, squeezing in pulses. Breath on his neck, on his face. Grounding.

"Your name is Will Graham. You are in Baltimore, Maryland, at a crime scene. You are alright, I am here. I have you."

He hears the words spoken like they're underwater. His head is killing him. *"You know my voice. Follow my voice, sweet boy."*

The water is dark, murky. It presses in on him from all sides, oppressive and heavy and putting pressure on his lungs.

“Breathe for me. It will be alright. You are coming back now.”

He feels wet and reaches up with his free hand to touch his face. Damp, salty tears run twin tracks down his cheeks. His eyes sting, his throat feels like it’s burning.

The water is parting. Something is pushing him up. He kicks his legs and swims towards the surface where light becomes visible in a single strand, so bright, he thinks he could grasp onto it. He tries, reaching out with his hand, and it pulls him the rest of the way up.

He comes to with a start, dragged out of the Ripper’s mind with a force that leaves him panting for breath. Hannibal is beside him, touching his shoulder, still gripping his hand tightly, and looking for all the world like he was hanging on by a thread.

“What did you see, Will?”

Will breathes out a shaking breath, wipes a hand over his face, smearing his tears further into his skin. “You.” He puts his glasses on to hide the worst of the mess on his face, using the sleeve of his coat to wipe away any remnants he can before Jack gets back. Will swallows thickly. “Is it real? Or is this another lie?”

“This is real. Never again will I lie to you. I promise, and I always keep my promises.”

Will knows he does. “How does no one else see it?”

“Because only you could ever see me.”

“Only because you wanted me to.”

“No, Will. You saw me even when I didn’t want you to. It’s why I kept you sick. Up until I couldn’t anymore.”

Will takes that in, allowing it to wash over him. It’s honest, he knows it is. He knows Hannibal loves him. He knows Hannibal wants to atone.

Will knows he’s close to caving.

“You said to me once that I hold the key. Is this the lock?”

“The choice is yours,” Hannibal confirms.

“You know I’m going to protect you,” Will argues.

Or at least, he should. This was done purposefully. He was giving Will the option, he realizes with a heavy heart. The option to lead the investigation closer to him, or away from him. It was his choice. It was always meant to be his choice.

This will mean lying for someone who abused him. This will mean covering for someone who hid horrible deeds from him, committed awful things to his person for his own gain.

“I don’t know that. You are unpredictable, and I deserve no less than your wrath.”

“My wrath is not going to land you in a prison cell, Hannibal. You don’t deserve my wrath. You’re not worthy of it.” Will sighs and turns back to the body. He regrets his words instantly. He didn’t mean them. “I’m ready for Jack,” he says instead of apologizing.

Hannibal hesitates, but eventually goes to retrieve him. Two sets of heavy footfalls echo throughout the chamber as Hannibal brings the agent back to the scene where Will waits.

“What did you see, Will?” Jack barrels his way over, shouldering past Hannibal to get to Will.

“Jack, give him a minute –”

“I don’t have a minute!” he says to Hannibal firmly. He sighs and swipes a hand over his face tiredly. “Is it him?”

“You know it is,” Will says blandly. “He feels angry. We took something away from him. This is a message to us,” Will lies through his gritted teeth. Hannibal gives Will an odd look, eyes flicking over his face in soft surprise.

“What does he feel we took from him?” Jack asks quietly.

Will shrugs, but then makes his face fall a moment later with calculated movements. He looks at Jack with a feigned mixture of confused surprise and hardened fury. “His patsy.”

Jack turns to face Will fully. “We haven’t taken anyone into custody, we haven’t used deadly force on anyone connected to the Ripper. Who did we take, Will?”

He can’t just outright say it. It would be too obvious. He will need to lead Jack to his own answer. Will closes his eyes. “Who do we know that’s a prior surgeon turned psychiatrist?” Will asks him. His voice is steel. His eyes flick around Jack’s grim face.

“Hannibal,” Jack says, giving the man in question an apologetic look. “Chilton. I’m sure there are others. Surgeons burn out and need somewhere else to go with their doctorate.”

Will thinks to himself that Chilton likely didn’t burn out, he just wasn’t any good, but nods. “True. And who is exotic, or thinks themselves exotic? Who is arrogant, ostentatious, doesn’t understand the concept of boundaries?”

Jack gets a strange look over his face. “Chilton fits that profile.”

Hannibal keeps silent; waiting for the other shoe to drop. Will won’t let it. He turns his eyes from Jack to Hannibal, giving him a look that reads *you better step up.*

“Jack, I think Will is onto something,” Hannibal cuts in after a moment of tense silence. “Frederick records his patients without their consent. He talks about them to other psychiatrists, breaking confidentiality.”

Will turns to Hannibal like his words provoked deep thought. “Why would he do that?” he asks with mock surprise.

Jack thinks on it, Will can see the gears in his mind turning. The agent sways forwards and back slightly on his feet, and lets out a whoosh of breath, answering for Hannibal. “To peacock.” He’s falling for it, for any answer that gets him the Ripper. “He’s proud that he has all the crazies. He likes to rub it in others’ faces. I’d say that breaks boundaries.”

“It does more than that,” Hannibal says. “I would consider that quite ostentatious, wouldn’t you? His patients trust him, and he breaks that trust knowing full well another psychiatrist will catch him in the act. This shows me that he enjoys risk seeking behavior.”

“Hannibal,” Jack closes his eyes. Will holds his breath. “Give me some peace of mind. What were you doing last night?”

Hannibal stays silent, looks at Will hesitantly.

“I was with him, Jack. All night and into the morning. We stayed up … late.”

Jack holds up a hand. “I thought you two were fighting?”

Will sneers at him. “You arrived at that conclusion. I told you we were fine. We hit a rough patch, and well, last night we worked it out. Thoroughly.”

Jack shakes a hand at him. “That’s enough, spare me the details.” He directs his gaze to Hannibal who is looking at Will with a peculiar mixture of relief and disbelief. “Sorry, Hannibal. I just. I had to make sure.”

“I understand, Jack. It’s alright.”

“Have you noticed any other psychopathic tendencies in Chilton, Doctor?” Jack asks seriously.

“A few, yes. I can’t say I spend much time around him if it can be helped, but I invite him to dinner every so often and we do chat on occasion. He makes me … uncomfortable.”

“He makes us all uncomfortable, but I need more than that. Something objective.”

“He’s egotistical. His emotions are surface level. I’ve caught him in a number of lies. He is charming, but it is superficial. In the privacy of my mind, I have diagnosed him as a psychopath. I kept it to myself because he is a nonoffender.”

“That we know of,” Will mumbles.

“I’ve known him for a long time. He’s … I’m having difficulty accepting this,” Hannibal says with spurious sadness. “We need to be sure. Perhaps I can talk with him.”

“No, I don’t want to do anything to spook him just yet. Not when we’re this close,” Jack orders. “We wait.”

“Wait for what, Jack?” Will exclaims. “For him to take another innocent life?”

“We don’t know this is Chilton,” Jack booms. “We have to make sure.”

Will shakes his head frantically. “Who do we know that swore up and down he had the Ripper in his clutches?” Will tucks his hands into his coat. He wishes it were thicker, it’s cold out today and his worn flannel is doing him no favors, even inside. “You remember how he reacted when I caught him out. When I denounced his claim. He was *angry* . I think …” Will makes his voice wobble. “Gideon was his patsy. I think he’s gearing up to make Hannibal his next one.”

“You’re sure about this?”

“I can’t be a hundred percent sure, Jack. I have an empathy disorder, I’m not a psychic. But, it’s weird. And it fits. Look, all I’m saying is we ask Chilton his whereabouts last night. If he has a solid alibi, fine, we keep looking. If he has a weak alibi, we push. The Ripper is smart enough to have some kind of contingency plan, but he isn’t fool proof. Judging by the insect activity, I’d say this poor guy died around four this morning. Chilton is sure to have cameras all over his house. We need to check them if he has an alibi. If he’s not guilty, he’ll let us.”

“I agree,” says Hannibal.

Jack looks back and forth between Will’s eyes, looking for a hint of uncertainty or mistruth. Will knows he won’t find any. “Okay. We go today, then.”

Will nods. Hannibal inclines his head.

“I’ve already canceled my last lecture.”

“And I have no more patients for the day.”

“Good. Let me finish up here and then we’ll go.” Will and Hannibal turn to leave, but Jack stops them. “And hey, whatever was going on? Don’t let it interfere with work again.”

He’s going to have to ride with Hannibal, he already knows it. Jack is many things and apparently a meddling bastard is one of them. Will snarls, his headache roaring to life. He can feel sweat gathering under his arms and on his hands even through the chill of the Baltimore cold.

As they’re walking towards Hannibal’s black Bentley, the doctor speaks. “Will –”

“No.”

“We need to talk.”

“Let’s just keep this professional.”

“Ah, because that worked so well the first time,” Hannibal snips.

Will can’t really respond to that because Hannibal, unfortunately, is right. “What, then? What is there to talk about?”

Hannibal stops and turns to face him. Will stops too, but keeps looking out over the tree line.

“What isn’t there to talk about?” Hannibal asks him. He sounds vaguely irritated. Will kind of likes it.

He remembers the dinner party; how he had kept Hannibal on the edge of his seat for his own sense of vindication. He remembers how wrong it felt and wonders if he’s doing the same thing now, repeating a mistake, hoping for a different outcome.

He wonders if he’s really doing this because he needs the space, or if he’s punishing Hannibal. Punishing them both.

“You need to listen to me, and listen carefully,” Will says under his breath, looking around to make sure no one was close by. “You need to go to Chilton’s house and bypass his security system from the time of the murder and you need to do it soon. Then you’re going to make sure that ridiculous silver platter is gone from your record of purchase. That thing is gaudy as hell and very particular and it’s going to get you caught.”

“I paid cash for it at an antique shop in North Carolina wearing a disguise and speaking with an American accent. And I’ve already disabled Frederick’s video cameras, the ones leading to his back door and garage.”

“You –” He can speak with an American accent? Will is about to ask for a demonstration when he remembers he’s supposed to be mad at him. “Of course you did.”

“ … Did you like it?”

Will thinks long and hard about answering him. Truth is, it was beautiful. He felt moved. Hannibal’s heartfelt message had been received, but ultimately, Will still decides the other man doesn’t deserve his praise. His apology letter is not enough to meet the high hanging thread of his forgiveness. Will remains silent as the grave.

Hannibal reaches out to touch Will and Will takes a step back. His skin sings where Hannibal’s hand nearly touched him. “Will, please. Won’t you even look at me?”

Will stubbornly continues looking towards the trees, some still teeming with life, others dead. It’s a beautiful day out, despite the cold, maybe because of it. There’s not a cloud in the sky.

“Why are you doing this?” Hannibal asks. “Leading them to Chilton?”

Will licks his dry lips. He shouldn’t care. He shouldn’t fucking care about a man than psychologically abused him, that lied to him, that pretended he did nothing wrong when he had fucked him and told him he loved him. He shouldn’t fucking care because Hannibal certainly hadn’t up until he did, and only then.

Will does, though. Care. Deeply.

He cares because Hannibal is *his*. No one else can have him. Not another lover, not another country, and most certainly not the FB fucking I.

Will had seen into his mind, a mind that felt deeper than he could have ever thought possible, and he had witnessed regret, shame. He had seen it first hand today at the crime scene how

broken he was.

Hannibal misses him. Not only does he miss him, he can't live without him. His display said as much, his behavior that night, a three weeks ago now and fuck does it feel like longer.

"I'm doing this because I love you." Will's love is many things, but it is not conditional. "I thought the sentiment was returned."

"It is. Everything I've ever told you has been the truth, Will. I may have hid things from you, but I've never lied to you."

Will finally does look up at him at that because he has the *audacity* to lie once more.

"Bullshit," Will says softly. "You kept telling me I was going crazy."

Hannibal dips his head demurely as if in agreement. "I obfuscated, I did not –"

"I'm going to stop you right there," Will cuts him off. "Don't do that to me. Don't make me think things happened differently than they did. Stop. Manipulating me."

Hannibal's eyes look beautiful in the sunlight, so beautiful that it hurts to look at them for too long, like looking into the sun. They're standing but a few feet apart, Hannibal's visible breath in the cold air warms Will's face, smells stale.

"You want to fix things, Hannibal?" Hannibal straightens his slouched posture at the question, looking eager. "Stop. Lying to me. Stop gaslighting me. Show me I can trust you, because right now? I don't. And I can't love someone I don't trust. Don't tell me things I want to hear, don't cover up the truth anymore. Be straight with me. You just promised me in there that you wouldn't lie to me anymore. You promised me you'd do better. Is this your 'better?'" he asks incredulously.

"No," Hannibal says softly after a moment. "It's not."

"Meaning you can do better?"

"Yes. I can. I will."

"Prove to me that you deserve the chance. Now, let's try that again. You kept telling me I was going crazy."

"That was before I realized –"

"Wrong answer." Will starts to walk off so he can get in the car, but Hannibal stops him with a hand on his shoulder. Will freezes at the touch. He's missed it so much.

"I wanted you to believe you were going crazy. I wanted to break you open and it was the only path I saw. I wanted you to be like me by any means necessary. I didn't realize then that it was unnecessary."

Better. "Let's get in the car. I'm cold."

Hannibal's stupid luxury car has something Will wishes his did: seat warmers. As soon as they get in and Hannibal turns the engine over, Will dials his up to the highest setting and points the vents towards him as warm air starts circulating the cabin.

"I will never be like you," Will warns. "If you wanted a mirror image, you're barking up the wrong tree."

"I don't want some mirror image of myself. I want you. I've only ever wanted you."

"No. You wanted to change me."

"I wanted to see you fully realized. Not changed. Unburdened."

"Did you enjoy what you did to me?" Will asks. Something classical is playing at low volume through the speakers. Will reaches over to the dash and turns it off. Hannibal doesn't protest, doesn't even spare a glance, his eyes trained on only Will.

"I didn't feel particularly joyful, no. Excited at the possibilities, hopeful of my dreams becoming realized. I tried to ensure you were as comfortable as possible throughout the process."

His answer provides little comfort. "I never noticed needle marks or bruising."

"I used a very small gauge and I was very careful."

"You look horrible," Will says bluntly.

"I feel horrible."

"I wasn't aware you could." He wasn't aware that Hannibal could feel horrible, look horrible. It was beyond strange.

"Neither was I." A beat. "You smell like alcohol."

Will smiles even though it's not funny. "Yep."

"How much have you been drinking?"

"A lot."

He sees Hannibal shrug out of the corner of his eye. "As have I."

That surprises Will. He's never known Hannibal to drink to excess. He would consider it a waste of quality wine, or whatever he's been sipping on. Will tries not to feel concerned.

Will doesn't know how else to fill the silence, so he doesn't. It sits there between them like a rock the rest of the way to the BSHCI. He can feel Hannibal glancing at him every now and then, drinking in his presence. Will wants very badly to do the same, but stops himself every time. He doesn't want to give Hannibal the satisfaction of knowing Will has missed him. Not yet.

When Hannibal pulls up into the visitor's parking lot, they both hesitate. Hannibal keeps the engine running so they can have some heat as they wait for Jack.

"Will, what can I do?" Will doesn't know. He takes his eyes off the horrid building they sit in front of and turns them to Hannibal. He can't not anymore. His face is pained, open, raw. Just like it was that night.

Will quickly looks away.

"You can leave me alone."

Desperation stinks up the car. "It's been three weeks."

"Might be three more."

Hannibal makes a pained sound. "I can't wait three more."

Will huffs. Neither can he, honestly. "Yeah? You think we can salvage this as it stands now? What, you think there is any amount of *atoning* that would get you out of this?"

"Not particularly." Hannibal turns in his seat to fully face Will. "If I have to spend the rest of my life making it up to you, I will. I know I don't deserve the chance to prove myself, but I'm hoping with everything I am that you will give it to me anyway."

"Prove it with consistent honesty, then. Like you should have from the start."

Hannibal blinks at him. "I need you, Will. You want my honesty? There. You have it." Hannibal sighs audibly. "I am sorry. For all of it."

Will scowls. "I told you not to tell me what I want to hear. You just want to get your way."

"I'm not," Hannibal says with a raised voice. It shocks Will into silence, his face going slack. "I'm not," he says more quietly, closing his eyes and leaning back into his seat. "Look at the evidence, Will. It's there for the taking. Why would I offer my future up to you if I didn't love you, hmm? Why would I have told you the ugly truth that night if I didn't want resolution?"

"You don't want resolution, you want absolution."

"I want both, Will."

Will sighs, releasing a ball of tension taking residence in his chest. It's hardly a relief at all. "I don't know if I can give you either, Hannibal. You … you really hurt me."

"I know I did. I was hoping if you understood my reasons, you would forgive me."

"I already told you: I have forgiven you. That's the problem."

"How so?" Hannibal asks quietly, an eager edge to his voice.

“I’d forgive anything you did. With that much leeway, with that knowledge, you’ll only hurt me again knowing you can get away with it,” Will replies sadly.

“I won’t.”

“You can’t know that.”

“I do. I am fully aware of my actions, Will. I am fully in control of them.”

Will closes his eyes. He’s right.

A car sounds out from the distance. Will turns his head to see a familiar SUV and unbuckles his seatbelt. “Jack’s here.”

“Will –”

“We’ll talk about this later.”

“We will?” Hannibal asks hopefully. God, but the unmistakable hope in his voice breaks the last of Will’s resolve. It shines in his eyes, threatening to leak out.

“We will.” Will allows himself a minute to rest his head back against the passenger seat and breathe. Hannibal is looking at him. Will turns his head to meet his gaze. “We need to do this first.”

“Alright.”

“Don’t let them keep me here,” Will pleads. “I hate coming here.”

“I will kill anyone who tries to take you away from me.” It shouldn’t be comforting to hear that, but Will can’t deny that it really is.

Hannibal will provide Will with some much needed stability, support, even with the rift between them. He’ll be sorely needing it stepping into the abysmal building. Hannibal will ensure that when Will steps foot in this dreaded place, he'll be stepping back out the same day.

Will and Hannibal get out of the Bentley simultaneously and close the doors as if in perfect sync. They walk up together to meet Jack as the man is hopping spryly out of his own car.

They all look at each other knowingly. This will be fun for exactly none of them.

The three men make their way inside side by side, Hannibal between Will and Jack. Will’s teeth ache from clenching his jaw so tightly and his skin feeling two sizes too small. The doors close behind them and it rings like a bell in his skull.

It smells nothing like a hospital within the massive and ostentatious building and everything like a pretty prison – from this angle at least. He knows the truth about how it really appears where it counts, where the lost souls are kept: dark, dingy, hopeless.

At least on the path to Chilton's overbearing office, there are no inmates he has to look at, no visible, desperate pleas for escape he has to see, no way to look into their minds, their madness, and hope he'd find his way back out unscathed.

Frederick Chilton is outside of his office speaking with a young orderly when they walk up towards him. Will doesn't bother hiding his disdain for the man when they lock eyes.

"Thank you, Matthew, that will be all," he says to the man in all white, who's eying Will up and down like a steak before he wanders off towards the entrance to the holding cells. Hannibal lifts his lip up in a small snarl at the obvious lust in the orderly's eyes and steps closer to Will. Will welcomes it.

Chilton turns to them with an oil slick smile. "Agent Jack Crawford, Dr. Lecter" he says haughtily before his eyes dip to Will. "Ah. And Mr. Graham. What a pleasure."

"I'm afraid this isn't a social call, Frederick," Jack intones, unaffected by the pompous attitude the man wears like an ill-fitting suit. "We need to ask you a few questions. Privately."

Will knows, intellectually, that Chilton has nothing to worry about. He is not the Chesapeake Ripper, after all, and has no reason to be nervous. Except now that Will and Hannibal are playing, he does.

It's a mark in their favor when Chilton walks them into the spanning depths of his office, filled with books and statues and wide, open windows, with little more than a smile on his stupid face. He looks unbothered – the Ripper would also look unbothered: risk taking behavior, attention seeking. It was playing out perfectly. Will just had to make sure it stayed that way.

Jack gives them a sidelong glance behind Chilton's back. Will clenches his jaw in a show of disgust, casts his eyes down as if he's agreeing with whatever Jack is thinking. It's not a far stretch, only embellished for appearances sake. Hannibal raises a delicate eyebrow.

Chilton takes a seat in his cushy chair and folds his hands on top of his desk. "What can I do for you gentlemen? I'm rather busy, so this will need to be expedient, if you please."

"Abel Gideon," Jack starts. "You were sure he was the Ripper. He died, if I recall. I'm sketchy on the details."

Chilton's face pales incrementally, but he's quick to muster up his usual smarmy bravado. "Yes, well. He took his own life. As much as it saddens me when a patient does so, there was nothing I could have done."

What a load of shit. Will nods, looking at the floor. He takes his glasses off his face and slides them into the front pocket of his olive drab coat.

"The circumstances around Gideon's death are … peculiar. There was nothing in your notes that indicated suicidality. It was all very sudden," Will states lightly, for he knows the truth. Not all of it, but it doesn't take a genius to figure out the missing details.

Hannibal had been his psychiatrist per the recommendation of Alana for a third opinion, not a rarity in a place like this. It's not hard to imagine that Hannibal planted ideas in Abel's suggestable mind to get rid of the False Ripper in a way that wouldn't lead back to him.

Psychic driving is, apparently, something Hannibal is *very* good at. Will doesn't doubt, for one second, his success.

"Are you implying something?" Chilton tilts his head at them, a gesture he no doubt picked up from someone else. Nothing he does is original. It's all a glimmering copy of mannerisms he takes on to better project his own self-importance. Will doesn't stop himself from rolling his eyes. "Suicidal intention was measured and no risk was ascertained on my end and my end is the only end that matters. And if you're going to be questioning my methods, perhaps you should add Hannibal Lecter's to the list," he says, shooting Hannibal a glare.

"That's the thing, Dr. Chilton," Jack says in a measured tone. "Both Alana's and Hannibal's notes indicate a high risk assessment. Yours are the only ones that don't."

"That's … not possible." Chilton grabs a pen off his desk and starts to fiddle with it.

"As it so happens, both Dr.'s Bloom and Lecter both noted the risk he was to himself weeks before his death," Will replies. "It was part of the case notes for the standard investigation."

"They said nothing about it to me."

"I find that difficult to believe," cuts in Jack. "Law states that doctor-patient confidentiality may be broken if the patient is in immediate danger to themselves or others, and Dr.'s Bloom and Lecter would have told you of the risk he was to himself."

"I, in fact, did. If you recall, Frederick," Hannibal says, unfolding his coat and draping it over his arm genteelly.

"That's conjecture!"

Will smiles with teeth at the bewildered psychiatrist and steps close to his desk. Jack watches them both and lets Will talk. "Is it? Then how do we know? We can show you the case files, if it would ease your mind." That part is easy to prove. It's true that they had both been concerned, Alana's genuine, Hannibal's not so much.

Chilton fumbles for an answer, but nothing comes forth. Will smirks.

"Where were your whereabouts this morning between one and six, Doctor?" Jack asks.

Chilton splutters. "Am I a *suspect*?"

"Answer the question, please," Jack says.

"I was at home!"

"Can anyone confirm this?" Jack asks.

Will knows the answer is going to be a resounding *no* and waits patiently while the man gathers his wits about himself. It takes barely two blinks before Chilton's arrogant charm is back in place, but Will can see the seams where it bends and folds.

"Sure," he says with a shrug. "My security system. Now, may I ask why you're asking?"

Jack's face is stern, his eyes hard. "We need to rule out everyone who fits the profile of the Chesapeake Ripper."

Chilton's eyes practically bug out of his head. "And I do?!"

Jack nods. "And you do."

He shoots up from his over-plush seat. "Hannibal Lect –"

"Has been sufficiently ruled out," Jack booms. "He doesn't fit the profile." *Quite like you do* goes unsaid. Will breathes out a quiet sigh of relief. "We'll be getting a warrant for that security footage. Unless … you'd volunteer it to us?" Jack gives him the choice.

"I've done nothing wrong!"

"Then you'll let us look at the security footage?" Will hedges.

"No!"

Jack smiles. "I'll meet you at your house with a warrant," he says. He gives a nod to Will and Hannibal and they are off. There's not much else to say. Chilton's alibi is weak, Jack is getting his warrant, and that's that.

Will's breathing is uneven as they leave, his pulse thundering in his body, his skin itching, thrumming with nervous, queasy anticipation of leaving the BSHCI.

Hannibal strides up next to him. "I told you I wouldn't let him keep you here. All safe and sound."

"Gee, thanks."

"Good work, both of you," Jack says as they walk out of the main doors. "Will? I'll see you Monday. Dr. Lecter," he reaches out to shake their hands and then he's off. Leaving Hannibal and Will alone once more.

Hannibal turns to him eagerly. "You said we could talk."

Will huffs out a laugh. "You don't give up do you?"

"Not usually, no."

"Not ever, I think."

"I know when to quit. I quit being a surgeon, after all."

“Yeah, ‘cause it lost its thrill,” Will smiles. The banter has always been easy between them. He misses it. “You won’t quit with me,” Will replies with a sharp sureness in his voice. “Will you.”

“No.”

Will nods slowly as Hannibal puts his coat back on. “Why?”

Hannibal pauses what he’s doing to look at Will incredulously before resuming his task and buttoning up the garment. “Do you believe the Ripper is capable of love, Will?”

He’s definitely seen enough proof that he is.

Will’s lips smack slightly as he opens them. “Let’s not speak of him like he’s not in the room.”

Hannibal smiles and lets out a little laugh. “Alright, then. Do you believe me capable of love?”

Will flicks his eyes over Hannibal’s face like he’s reading a scene. He considers his answer carefully.

“No one’s love is the same. I think … you’re capable of a certain kind of love. You love in the way that feels right to you, even if it’s not right for others. I mean look at what you’ve done. No one who can put that much thought into something like what you have is incapable. Yes, you kill in cold blood, but in your mind, your victims deserve it. I think there are people you see as people, and people you see as pigs. Those you see as people, however long they hold that luxury, are capable of receiving your version of love.”

Hannibal looks away into the parking lot and Will wonders what he sees. “You’re wrong.”

Will raises his brow with wry amusement. “That’s not something I’m told often.”

“I see people as pigs until they prove themselves otherwise. I have never seen you as a pig. Not even at first glance. And even those that graduate into personhood in my eyes are not capable of receiving my love. Perhaps my time, perhaps my attention for a fleeting moment. Not my love.”

Hannibal looks back at him, his eyes wet. Will feels like he’s been gutted.

“Why me?” he whispers.

“Because you’re you.” Hannibal licks his lips. “Do you believe in love at first sight?”

Will doesn’t. He never has. “I believe in love at second sight,” he replies seriously, thinking of home cooked protein scramble in a dingy motel room, the only light the sun streaming in through the dirty window.

A tear falls from Hannibal’s eye. Another. “If my mistakes cost me you, I’ll never forgive myself.”

Will lets out a quiet breath, soft and trembling and holding everything he told himself he wouldn't say. "Take me to my car, please. Sorry you've been driving me everywhere."

Hannibal stills. Will walks to the Bentley without waiting for a response, but it's locked. Hannibal is standing where Will left him. Finally, after a few moments, he gathers himself and unlocks the car and they slide back into the heat. Hannibal closes his door and goes to grasp the steering wheel, his fingers slinking over the smooth leather like snakes over grass.

"You've made your choice then."

Will smirks. "I have."

He can tell Hannibal is rearing up to argue. Will doesn't want to make him suffer more than he already has.

If Hannibal wants to spend the rest of his life making it up to him …

… Will is going to let him.

"You're going to take me to my car. I'm going to go home and make sure the dogs are taken care of, and then I'm coming home and you're going to spend the rest of the night trying to sway my favor."

Hannibal turns so quickly it's a miracle he doesn't get whiplash. His face is as open as Will has ever seen it: hope, love, complete and absolute devotion and adoration. His eyes are wet. Will is trying not to let himself show too much, but it's no use. Hannibal brings out the best and the worst in him.

"You mean it."

Will smiles. "Take me to my car."

It's a quiet ride back to the BSU, full of anticipation, of disbelief.

Will gives one last lingering look at Hannibal who looks like he still can't quite believe what's happening and closes the door to his Bentley before he's off to his own car. Will never drives as fast as he does going home than he does now.

He feeds his dogs, plays with them in the yard for an hour with some of their favorite toys, takes a long, thorough shower, brushes his teeth twice and leaves his hair untamed. He dresses in clothes he usually would dress in because if Hannibal wants him, truly wants him, then he'll take him as he is. Flannel and chinos and his favorite scuffed boots. He forgoes his soft packer and leaves off his deodorant because he knows Hannibal likes him eu natural.

Just as he's about to leave, he stops. No. He won't hide anymore. He takes his pants and boxers off, puts on his packer, and redresses.

Will has one thought as he's driving the hour to Hannibal's house and it's nothing God would approve of.

It all happens very fast.

Will doesn't have to knock at Hannibal's door before it's opening and Hannibal is pulling him inside. Before he touches Will further, Will's back against the door and Hannibal crowding him in, he asks, "Are you sure, Will? I need you to be sure, I need …"

Will doesn't answer with words, he pulls Hannibal in by his hair, soft and supple and not greasy anymore, and kisses him like it's the first and last time. Hannibal kisses back like he's dying. Their lips slot together as perfectly as they always have and Will immediately tongues his way past Hannibal's lips, tasting the mint of a freshly brushed mouth, stroking along the uneven line of his teeth, the roof of his mouth, deeper than he's ever tasted.

Will tastes tears in their kiss and he doesn't know who they belong to, for they belong to them both.

Hannibal pushes him closer up against the door with his body weight, hands cupping his cheeks like he's precious, and slots a thigh between Will's. Will holds his breath, a thousand different *what if's* floating through his mind at a rapid pace.

When Hannibal feels what's there between his thighs, he stills. Will is about to explain himself, over-explain himself, anything to fill the crackling silence and get Hannibal's lips back on his, when Hannibal shifts so that their groins are pressed together instead of their thighs.

Hannibal rolls his hips, and *moans.*

Will can't rightly describe the relief that courses through him, the heat, the longing. God he's missed this stupid man, has missed him with every fucking fiber of his being. He can be angry with him all he wants, but later. He needs this. Fuck, does he need this.

Hannibal rolls his hips again, harder this time, panting against Will's mouth. His hands that had previously been gripping onto Will's hips move up and up until he's grasping onto Will's wrists and hoisting them above the younger man's head. The pressure of Hannibal's grinding against his packer presses against Will's anatomy deliciously and sparks of pleasure shoot down his limbs.

He could come like this. He thinks that's exactly what Hannibal intends, but that's not what Will wants.

Will manages to use his strength to turn around. Not for one moment does Hannibal, even while Will was repositioning himself, stop the desperate movements of his hips, humping Will like a dog unable to control himself. Now with his heavy erection between Will's ass cheeks, they both moan. Will's ass has always been sensitive and Hannibal feels so good.

Will struggles to get a hand between himself and the door as Hannibal continues rutting against him to undo his belt and pants. It takes a good minute of fumbling with his body meeting the heavy wood as he bounces against it with each roll of Hannibal's hips, but he eventually gets everything undone. He tries to shove his clothes down, but he's impeded by his horny partner.

"Hannibal, for God's sake, will you let up?" Hannibal whines low in his throat, but lets up with a huff of impatience. His hands are rhythmically gripping Will's wrists, caressing the delicate skin there with his thumbs. "Just for a second, I promise." Will, finally free of Hannibal's *humping,* shoves his pants and boxers down as low as he can get them.

Will turns his head to look over his shoulder. Hannibal is sweating, panting, mouth slack and eyes lovesick. "Atone," he whispers to the older man. "Show me that mouth is good for something other than lying to me."

A thunk as Hannibal drops to his knees. A kiss to his lower back as Hannibal pushes the material out of his way so can pepper more kisses to his heated skin. Teeth on his right cheek, not pressing yet, asking permission.

Will presses himself back against the sharpness, permission granted.

Hannibal nips lightly at first, sucking some of his plump skin into his mouth and laving it with his tongue, biting harder, harder, the more he sucks. Will presses into it, mouth gaping in a silent scream. Hannibal thrashes his head gently, trying to bite deeper without taking a piece of him. Will is grateful for his restraint.

"I know you want to eat me," Will manages to get out through his heavy breaths, "so do it." Will reaches back to part himself. "Eat me."

Hannibal, behind him, moans obscenely and wastes no time attaching his mouth to Will's hole.

The contact is gentle compared to the number his teeth had just done on Will, lips soft and yielding, the flat of his tongue licking him with soothing strokes. It feels wonderful. Will rests his head against the front door and closes his eyes, letting the sensations Hannibal is giving him wash over his tired body. Will feels his hole gradually begin to relax under his constant ministrations, allowing Hannibal's tongue to lick even deeper.

He can feel Hannibal's freshly shaven cheeks wisping against the skin of his cleft, his strong chin jutting in near his front hole. He's completely encompassed as Hannibal's hands take over holding Will open, gripping his cheeks with shaking hands. He is touched everywhere, it feels like; this one point of contact spreading into every cell of his body and all he can do is stand there and take it as Hannibal eats him out with ravenous hunger.

Soft kitten licks alternating with firm strokes, sucking at his rim when his tongue withdraws back in his mouth to give his jaw a break. It goes on for what feels like forever when it can't be more than minutes. Will pants against the door, rocking his hips back in Hannibal's face for more and Hannibal, good boy that he is, gives it to him.

"Han – baby, I'm close. Such a good boy." Will reaches back and threads a hand into Hannibal's hair, grinding his face in deeper. "Fuck, don't stop, don't stop –"

Hannibal groans against him at the lewd words, at the endearment, at the taste of him. He sharpens the tip of his tongue into a point and delves inside Will's hot depths, soaked with saliva, the glide of Hannibal's tongue is smooth as he wiggles it inside. Will cries out, a sound that would put a porn star to shame, tugging Hannibal's hair harder as he crests.

His whole body feels like it's on fire as his orgasm washes over him and he can feel his sloppy hole clenching around Hannibal's invading tongue. Hannibal gasps when he feels it, fucking in harder to help Will ride it out. Will can't keep his hips still, can't keep his voice down.

He comes down in waves, ebbing and flowing in and out of himself as he catches his breath, his muscles trembling. In the aftermath, his skin buzzing, Hannibal starts to softly lick at his asshole again, helping him calm down. Will doesn't get oversensitive here, so he lets Hannibal do as he pleases.

Eventually, he picks his head up off the door, giving Hannibal's hair a firm tug away from his body so he can shuffle back around. Hannibal whines at the loss, but lets Will direct him, as he always does when they're together like this.

"You did such a good job, Hannibal," he praises shakily. "Fuck, that was good." When he looks down at his partner, he sees the obscene tent in his tailored trousers. Will tilts his head at the sight, considering. Hannibal just watches him. "Have you touched yourself at all while I've been away?"

Hannibal's jaw ticks at the reminder that Will had left for almost a month. "Every night. I missed you."

Will hums. "Then you can wait a little longer, can't you?"

Hannibal's eyes close with resignation. "If I have to."

"Good. Let's go upstairs. I'll bet your knees are hurting. C'mon." Will offers his hand to help Hannibal off of the ground and he takes it, kissing the back of it before standing.

Will's legs are a little shaky as he follows Hannibal to his bedroom on the second floor. If Hannibal notices, he doesn't gloat, doesn't look smug. If anything, he looks like he's waiting for Will to walk out that door again. Will has no intention of doing so.

When they make it to the bedroom, it's a situation similar to their first time together: Hannibal unsurely wringing his hands and looking at Will like he doesn't know what to do and Will feeling a mixture of excitement and nerves. Will starts taking off his clothes without

ceremony. Hannibal watches as Will divests himself one article at a time, taking in the skin that exposes itself with greedy eyes, eyes that may never see this again, never experience this again.

Will doesn't want him on the edge of his seat. He realized at the dinner party that playing with the man's feelings holds no appeal.

"You think I'm leaving after." It's not a question.

Hannibal huffs a humorless laugh. "I don't know what to think."

"Well you must be thinking something," Will quips.

Hannibal hasn't taken his eyes off Will's now naked form. "Not currently."

Will walks up to him with slow, steady steps, legs no longer trembling with the force of his orgasm. Hannibal's eyes dip up to meet his before going back down a few times, flicking his eyes over Will's body and face respectively like he doesn't know what he wants to look at more.

"Do you remember what I said the night of the party? Three weeks ago?"

"I'd remember every word even if it were a lifetime ago."

Of course Hannibal would say that. Will believes him, too. "Then you know what I'm about to allow you."

Hannibal's sharp gaze flicks up to meet Will's in less than a millisecond. He shakes his head once.

Will tilts his head curiously, an unspoken question.

"I haven't earned that," Hannibal replies seriously.

"I think that's for me to say, and I think even if you haven't earned it, I'm going to give it to you anyways because it's my choice."

Hannibal exhales quietly through his flared nostrils. His gaze wavers. "You're right."

"Do you not want to?" Will asks, only partially dreading his answer.

"Of course I do. But if we do this, it will make it that much harder to let you go again, Will. I barely survived the first time. I cannot survive a second."

Will frowns and takes a step closer to the fully clothed man. His erection has flagged, Will notes, and he plans to remedy that as soon as this is taken care of. This is more important. Emotional intimacy has always been more important to him than physical intimacy and they've both recently suffered the loss of both. Their wounds would need careful tending, and Will has no doubts that Hannibal is, in fact, wounded. A wounded animal is dangerous, but Hannibal is no animal and Will is unafraid.

“Neither of us would,” Will says, reaching out to Hannibal. Hannibal takes a few steps towards the naked man and gently grasps his hands. “I never intended to leave you permanently, Hannibal. I just needed space.”

“Separation of any kind is unthinkable to me, Will. I can’t.”

“Do you have anything else you need to tell me?” Hannibal shakes his head. “Are you going to do anything else to me without my explicit informed consent?” Hannibal shakes his head again, vehemently. “Then we have nothing to worry about, do we?”

Hannibal looks unsure.

“I won’t pretend like a part of me still isn’t angry, but I’ve let most of it go. I need your help letting go of the last of it. Can you do that?”

“I doubt having sex will help.”

“It’s not just sex, Hannibal. We’re in the place we first made love, feeling the same things we did then. This is a second chance. A clean slate. Help me wipe the last of the chalk off.” Will smiles at him, easy and genuine. “Undress, please.”

Hannibal doesn’t need to be told twice. He throws his clothes on the ground in an uncharacteristic show of hurriedness, his movements lacking his usual grace, and then he’s just as bare as Will is.

Hannibal goes to him, presses up against him, his chest hair tickling Will’s sensitive nipples, his half hard cock brushing against Will’s own bits. It feels good to feel him like this again, for the first time all over. Will intends to do it right this time, and knows Hannibal shares the sentiment.

“I’m surprised. You seemed to like me wearing my packer,” Will says.

“You haven’t ever wore it around me. I assumed you simply didn’t even though I’ve …”

Will squints his eyes. “You’ve what?”

He eyes Will sheepishly. “I looked through your things.”

“Goddamnit Hannibal,” Will snorts. “When?”

“Before I promised to do better, after you told me you were transgender. I was curious about you. I wanted to know more and I happened upon your collection while you were sleeping one night.”

“Hannibal, that’s … incredibly creepy. Not to mention rude.”

“Yes.”

Nothing else then. Fine. Apparently, rudeness is only intolerable when it happens *to him*.

Will honestly isn't even that mad about it. He's had a thought or three about snooping through Hannibal's stuff, but he has a little thing called self control.

"If you want to know something, please just ask next time," Will says, trying not to sound frustrated.

"I know that now. I'm sorry." He pauses, trailing his fingers up Will's hand to his wrist. "I like when you wear it, yes. I only like it if you do. It matters not to me if you do or don't"

Will feels himself flush from the topic of conversation, even though he brought it upon himself. He's never talked about this with anyone before. "I wear it almost everyday. Usually. I was trying to be conscientious of your sensitive nose."

"Your smell has never bothered me, and I don't want you changing for me. If you want to wear it, you hardly need my permission, but I will always want you to be true to yourself."

It's comforting to hear that, it really is. Will feels a knot he didn't fully know existed unwind in his stomach. It's more comforting than when Hannibal said he'd kill anyone who ever tried to take him away from him, but just barely.

"You're everything to me," Will says against his lips. "Even though you're a rude creep."

"Your rude creep."

Hannibal leads him to the bed and lays Will down on top of the pristine duvet that they are about to thoroughly ruin. Will feels a thrill at finally doing this with Hannibal. He's been inside him, sure, but not like *this.* Not in the way Will prefers. Hannibal's cock is going to fill him up so nicely without being too much. He's perfect for Will, like he was made for him.

Will scoots his backside up the mattress until his head hits the plush pillows, wanting to be comfortable. Hannibal crawls on the bed over him, looming over him when they are chest to chest, and drops into a sitting position when he's squarely between Will's spread thighs.

"Just to be clear," Hannibal says, "you want me inside of you? Here?" And then he strokes a delicate finger across his asshole, still damp from Hannibal's mouth.

Will nods his head twice. "If you're okay with that."

"Will. Any way we make love is what I'm okay with. More than."

The younger man smiles, feeling better than he has since he and Hannibal's fight; sober and happy and excited for the future. He reaches into the bedside drawer where the lube is located and hands it to the other man who takes it with a kiss to his lips that lingers and deepens. Will cups Hannibal's face in his hands and keeps him there just to keep enjoying what he denied them both for so long.

Without breaking the kiss, Hannibal opens the small bottle and squeezes some out onto his fingers. When a warm, wet finger brushes against his hole, Will can feel it trembling.

"You're shaking," Will notes with a concerned frown.

Hannibal licks his lips, the only tic besides twitching fingers that Will has seen him do. “I want to make this good for you.”

“Baby, you always have. Every time. It’s just me, if you’re doing something I don’t like, you know I’ll tell you and we’ll move on. It’s going to be okay. It’s going to be great, because it’s us.”

Hannibal looks like he’s about to cry. Will leans up and kisses his forehead, each of his cheeks, his chin, his nose as he strokes a soothing hand up and down his flank.

“This is our second chance, you said. It has to be perfect.”

“No, Hannibal,” Will gently corrects him, “it has to be real.”

He clenches his jaw as he swallows thickly, looking at Will like he’s everything he ever wanted, and Will no longer feels egotistical in understanding that he is. The events of the past three weeks, hell, *all of it* have shown him as much. He was stupid to think otherwise. He had a right to be angry, he had a right to do so much more than be angry, but in the end, the only choice he could have made was Hannibal.

Will bends his legs at the knee and plants his feet on the bed, widening his hips and spreading his legs as far as they’ll comfortably go. Hannibal looks down in astonishment and takes him in, like he did their first time, like he’s done every time.

He lays his lithe body out between Will’s legs and brings his wet finger back to his hole, circling it with a tender touch before pushing inside Will’s tight heat. It’s been awhile since he’s done this, even with himself, and Hannibal’s fingers are longer than his and slightly thicker, making even one feel huge.

“Fuck,” Will whispers, tilting his hips up for more. Already the buzzing of pleasure is overtaking him, turning him into a puddle.

Hannibal breathes out noisily at either the feeling of Will around his finger or the curse that leaves his lips, or maybe both and begins to fuck his finger in and out at a slow pace.

“You can add another. You won’t break me.”

“Please let me savor this. I’m not going anywhere,” Hannibal pleads openly.

Will opens his eyes, not remembering having closed them, and looks at his partner, his man. He looks almost as devastated as he did the night Will left, looking at where his finger sinks into Will’s body with abject amazement and wet eyes, mouth parted on words he can’t make himself speak.

It doesn’t take too much longer before Hannibal is rewetting his fingers and adding another, swirling them around Will’s depths to properly coat him inside and then he’s properly fucking him with them, his pace less controlled, his face so open Will could weep. His movements are slightly uncoordinated and Will loves it all the more for it. He’s not putting on a show, he’s not trying to be something he’s not, he’s being real. Just as Will wanted.

“Will …”

“Good, baby?”

He closes his eyes at the endearment. “So good, Will.” He drips cold lube down Will’s cleft and brings his fingers out to rub it into his skin and then he’s going back in with three.

Will has no prostate and Hannibal doesn’t insult him by trying to find something that isn’t there. He doesn’t mourn it, though, not when his body is so reactive here, alive with nerve endings he feels blessed to have. He feels so full, and Hannibal is touching him exactly as he likes, stroking his walls on all sides and sliding deep. He’s so deep, Will can feel his thumb resting against his perineum as he undulates his fingers, twisting his wrist to make sure no part of him goes untouched.

“God, Hannibal. Such a good boy, you know exactly what to do.”

Hannibal keens at the praise, thrusting in hard. Will gasps and arches his back in a deep bow, grinding down on his perfect fucking fingers. He keeps thrusting like that and Will is about to lose his mind.

“Will.”

“C’mon, you know you want inside,” Will says huskily, staring at Hannibal who is staring at his drenched fingers as they work Will open. “You want to be inside my tight ass and fuck me into this mattress, so do it.”

Hannibal can’t wait anymore if his hurried, desperate movements are anything to go by. He pulls his fingers out and slicks his cock with them and then he’s lining himself up and pushing inside too quickly. Will bears down until Hannibal is seated to the hilt and makes himself breathe through the stretch.

“God, god, *fuck.* ” Will is going to come and it’s going to be soon. He’s so full, Hannibal’s cock pressing up against him on all sides of his walls and filling him up so perfectly. His asshole tightens around the sudden intrusion, but Will wills himself to relax and let Hannibal take what he needs.

Hannibal leans down and brackets Will’s head in between his forearms and Will reciprocates by locking his ankles behind Hannibal’s back. He can hardly take another breath before Hannibal is thrusting into him at a wild pace, panting and muttering under breath about how good Will feels, about how he’ll kill anyone who has ever seen Will like this, about how ruined he is.

He looks ruined, for sure. His hair is sweaty and plastered to his forehead, his eyes screwed shut and mouth gaping open as he thrusts and thrusts, his face flushed. He doesn’t fucking stop, he doesn’t slow down, and Will is about to lose it.

His nails rake down Hannibal’s back deep enough to leave welts. “That’s it, baby, take what you need,” Will utters through his body jolting from the punishing movements of Hannibal’s hips, his balls slapping against him lewdly and creating a cacophony of wet flesh. “Show me

who I belong to, yeah? Fuck, Han, such a good fucking boy. Look at you. Losing it over my sweet hole."

"Will, please, please." Hannibal is crying now, sobbing against Will's neck.

Will feels a coiling deep in his pelvis, spreading up his back and stomach and invading his limbs. "C-close. So close. So good," Will babbles. The coiling is only getting tighter, hotter. A few more thrusts and he thinks it'll explode without barely any friction to his little cock.

Will grips Hannibal by the hair and pulls him back so he can look at him, but Hannibal's leaking eyes are still tightly shut. "Look at m-me. Look at me when I come on your cock," Will commands.

Hannibal opens his eyes, shining with tears and love, such a beautiful shade of brown, nearly red in the dim light of the bedside lamp.

"You're mine," Will hisses through clenched teeth. "You're all fucking mine and don't you ever, *ever,* forget that."

"Yours, Will. Don't you know? I've always been, even when I was a fool."

His harsh thrusts haven't stopped, not once, and Will can feel his toes curling. His hands tighten in Hannibal's hair as he brings his forehead down to rest against his. His mouth drops open in a silent scream, eyes focussed deeply on Hannibal's as he thrashes through it, his body out of his control now. His orgasm is exploding stars and white hot, constant pleasure as he squeezes around Hannibal's cock and *screams*.

Hannibal watches him the whole time. He's no longer pulling his cock nearly all the way out and slamming back in for how tight Will is as his muscles convulse, but turn into deep grinds, just as desperate, just as needy. His breaths are almost obnoxiously loud in Will's ear, his groans and grunts a symphony.

Hannibal is shaking, his arms unable to hold him up without struggle, but he tries so that he doesn't crush Will. His back and ass are flexing as he works himself to completion with frenzied motions of his hips as they slap against Will's ass, loud in the otherwise quiet room.

"Call me that again, Will. Please. I'll die if you don't."

"What, my good boy?"

Hannibal frantically nods his head.

"You deserve it, don't you? You've made me feel so good, haven't you? Such a good boy, such a good bo –"

He's cut off by the choked sob that emits from somewhere deep in Hannibal's lungs and he's marked by the first rope of come he can feel filling him up. The pulses keep coming and Hannibal keeps riding his ass, his cock twitching inside him with each release of hot fluid. There's so much of it, it's never ending. Hannibal hasn't stopped his sobbing, his moaning, looking at Will obediently through it all.

“Good boy,” Will whispers, stroking a hand through his ash blonde hair. “Thought you could break me, but I’m the one that broke you, huh? My good boy.”

Hannibal is a mess on top of him; face wet with tears and nose running, hair sticking up from Will’s hands, sweaty and debauched and *his*.

“I can take your weight. Fall onto me.”

Hannibal does as he’s told, lowering himself fully onto Will, still snuggly inside of him, still locking eyes with him. It’s heaven to feel him like this, to see him like this. And it’s all Will’s.

“Will, that was … I’m …”

“Good, yeah?”

“Your mouth is filthy.”

“You love it.”

“I do,” Hannibal whispers. “I love everything about you.” Will smiles at him and Hannibal finally drops his head down to rest in the crook of Will’s neck. He strokes along his sweaty back, tracing the welts he had left in his passion. “I got you something.”

Will tenses, but makes himself relax. He’s never been especially good at receiving gifts. “Oh?”

Hannibal reaches to his nightstand and into it, and pulls out a velvet box, small and black. Will’s breath stills.

Hannibal leans up and rests his weight on his elbow as he looks at Will for any sign of rejection. He finds none. He pops open the little box and takes out something that shines. Will has a thousand things he wants to say, but no words come out.

“I know this is quick. I know we haven’t been seeing each other for more than a month and that’s including when you were absent from me, but. I knew the moment I saw you, that one day we would be here,” Hannibal says softly, reverently. “I knew from the moment I met you, Will Graham, that you were my destiny.”

Will remains speechless, looking between the ring and Hannibal.

“I love you with everything that I am and everything I never knew I had. I want to spend the rest of life with you, Will. Say you want me back.”

“You … you know I do.”

Hannibal asks, shakily, “Will you marry me, Will?”

“When did you have this made? I know that’s not store bought,” he says in lieu of replying. He doesn’t mean to be cruel, but it’s the only thing he can think of to say.

Hannibal presses his lips together shyly. “A while ago.”

“How long is a while?”

“Does it matter?”

“I don’t ask questions that don’t matter.”

Hannibal sighs quietly and toys with the ring. “May 17th.”

Will thinks. That was … around the time Hannibal killed Budge.

I was worried you were dead.

I got here on my own, but I appreciate the company.

The look that had been in Hannibal’s eyes was not something Will could recognize then, even with his empathy. He hadn’t even put the pieces together when Hannibal had admitted to him that that’s when everything had changed.

That had been the look of a man decided. In love, and sure of it, and *decided.*

Will swallows with a clicking throat. “Hannibal.”

He looks down at Will’s chest, his eyes tight. “I know.”

“Yes.”

Hannibal’s head shoots up. “Yes?”

Will scrunches his face up playfully now that he has his bearings about him. “What else did you think my answer was going to be?”

“I was 50/50.” Will dips his chin and stares at him knowingly. “Alright, I was 40/60.”

“Put the damn ring on.”

As he does, as it slides into place, Will has his first chance to really look at it. It’s a silver band, masculine and tasteful, with two solid lines of popping color: one a bright sapphire, and the other a shining enstatite. The color of both of their eyes, in one piece, always together.

Will sees something else in the small box. A matching ring a few sizes bigger than his own.

He sits up fully, suddenly feeling very serious. “I want to,” he says, eyeing the other ring.

Hannibal takes a shaky breath and holds his hand out. It trembles slightly in the air between them. Will takes the ring out of the box carefully and slides it onto Hannibal’s ring finger. For how sudden this all is, this feels nothing but right.

Will feels something slot into place when he has the ring on Hannibal’s finger, something he never thought he could have but has always wanted. It fills the spaces in his chest that have

been absent since his mother left, gnawing and empty and hungry growing up with a father who could barely stand the sight of him.

A family.

Hannibal is his family.

“I want kids,” Will says apropos of nothing.

“As do I.”

“I can’t conceive naturally anymore, but we could adopt. Or something.”

“I would enjoy fostering and letting the child choose if they wanted us.”

“You’d … you’d have to keep your activities … infrequent. I refuse to raise a child on my own. I can’t lose you, Hannibal.”

“You won’t. I would stop.”

Will blinks. Blinks again. “You’d stop?”

“Without you having to ask. If we have a child, Will, I would devote myself entirely to being the father the child deserved, the father I could have been to Mischa.”

Will has to blink back tears, but then realizes he really doesn’t. They fall freely in fat drops down his cheeks.

“We could take holidays. Go to places away from here and kill together. We can still have our own lives and be the fathers our child deserves. It would have to wait until they were older so we can take proper care of them. I don’t want nannies or babysitters.”

It’s Hannibal’s turn to blink owlishly. His brain seems to have shorted out. “You’d kill with me?”

Will huffs. Is that all he got from that? Typical.

Truthfully, he has thought long and hard about this. If he accepts Hannibal, then there’s no reason he should keep denying his own self acceptance. He longs for overdo justice, to fix the wrongs of a corrupt system. He had wanted to be a cop to change things from the inside, but he soon realized that it couldn’t be done with one man alone, and he was alone for the most part.

He wants to be the one to dole it out. He wants Hannibal by his side when he does it.

“Every once in a while,” Will eventually says, “if I agreed with your choice of swine. If you could ever agree with mine.”

“The quarry matters not to me, Will. Your company, seeing you in your full radiance, that is what matters to me.”

“I’m fully radiant now, your love has seen to that. You would simply be seeing another side of my radiance.”

Hannibal’s eyes are positively glowing. “So I would be. And what a privilege that would be.”

“It’s settled then. We get married. One day, we will foster a child and, if that child wants us, we will be their fathers until our dying day. Until then, we chose together. I won’t always want to kill with you, but I will never stop you. I might ask one day that we take it easy, but I will never ask you to change. My love, my life, is yours, and yours is mine. If you ever stray, if you ever try to leave me, I’ll kill us both. This is my vow to you.”

Hannibal takes his hands into his and pulls him into his lap. Will goes easily and wraps around him like an octopus with all of his limbs. “It will never come to that, mylimasis. Never. *That* is my vow to *you*. I vow to always do right by you from now on, I vow my honesty and my love to you forever.”

Will smiles and Hannibal smiles back, wide and toothy. “Maybe we should wait for the wedding before making vows.”

Hannibal shrugs. “I don’t need a priest and a piece of paper to make vows to you, Will. I make them freely with our bond as our witness.”

Will nods and cuddles in closer. He loves this kind of intimacy. Feeling Hannibal’s naked skin against his own, his soft cock resting against his groin, his breath on his face. “Holy shit. We’re engaged and we don’t even live together.”

Hannibal hums, nipping at the column of his throat. “Yes. We should rectify that. As soon as possible, I think.”

Will leans his head back so Hannibal can keep paying his neck attention. “I’m not getting rid of my dogs. Winston and Buster are too attached, Ellie and Harley are too old to rehome, Jack and Max need a firm hand or they’ll end up being dumped, and Zoe is too ugly, no one will want her.”

“I would never ask that of you,” Hannibal says, looking very nearly like he’s offended at the notion that he would ever ask him to give them up. “I will space here for them. For us. Things are just things. But,” Hannibal says firmly. “No dogs in our bedroom.”

Will laughs a watery laugh and hugs Hannibal to him again, laughing. “Fine. Deal.”

“Here or elsewhere?” Hannibal asks.

Will shakes his head and wipes his face. “We started here. I want to stay here. In this house. But I want to keep mine for long weekends.”

“Fair. I think that’s an excellent idea. You could still go fishing in peace and we could have a place to escape to when the city becomes too much.”

“Son or daughter?”

“Why not both?”

“Both, then.”

Hannibal is still smiling when their conversation comes to a natural close. Will leans in for a kiss which Hannibal eagerly grants him. Their lips slide together in soft strokes, parting and slotting together like two pieces of a puzzle. Hannibal sucks Will’s lower lip into his mouth, then the top one with gentle fealty.

“I still can’t believe this is happening,” Hannibal says. “This morning I woke up and I thought I’d never have you again.”

Will smirks. “Would you like to have me again?” he asks, rubbing his crotch against Hannibal’s. “Think you can get it up again, old man?”

Hannibal shows his teeth and tackles Will back onto the bed with a feral grin. “I will always get it up for you.”

Will laughs as Hannibal kisses down his chest and stops when Hannibal takes him into his mouth and then Will stops thinking altogether. For long hours they make love, and talk, and hold each other close, caressing every bit of skin within reach. Well into the night they stay up, cementing their new reality, their new future.

When they finally fall asleep, wrung out, exhausted, and covered in bodily fluids, they do so together, falling into a sleep with shared dreams.

Tonight marks the start of the rest of their lives.

Chapter End Notes

> And ... we're done. I still can't believe I wrote all of this. That you've spent your time reading my work means the world to me. I'm sorry if I've disappointed anyone with the last chapter, but I'm hoping you enjoyed it. I might add an epilogue in a a week or so, but I honestly need a break from writing lol. I've worked really hard on this every single day and I just. Yeah.
>
> You all are so great and your encouragement has been everything. I hope we see each other again.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!